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At the Crossroads Commercial Music and Community Experience The Quonset Auditorium - A Roadhouse on the Dixie Highway

Amber Ridington

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AT THE CROSSROADS
COMMERCIAL MUSIC AND COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE
THE QUONSET AUDITORIUM – A ROADHOUSE ON THE DIXIE HIGHWAY

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of
Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Amber Flower Ridington
December 2002

AT THE CROSSROADS
COMMERCIAL MUSIC AND COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE
THE QUONSET AUDITORIUM – A ROADHOUSE ON THE DIXIE HIGHWAY

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COMMERCIAL MUSIC AND COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

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Amber Flower Ridington December, 2002 165 pages
Directed by: Michael Ann Williams, Erika Brady, and Timothy Evans
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ABSTRACT

This study of the Quonset Auditorium, one roadhouse among many on the regular tour route of R&B, gospel and country musicians in the post-World War II era (1947-1959), illustrates the important role of roadhouses during a time of growth and change in popular music. It situates memories and experiences from the Quonset Auditorium in relation to regional and national movements of the day such as highway development, commercial and popular music, and the civil rights movement. With hindsight, we can see that the Quonset Auditorium stood at a crossroads as regards these social and technological movements of the post-WW II era and the metaphor of crossroads has been applied throughout this study.

Roadhouses have received little detailed attention in literature about commercial music, and this study has meant to provide details from the Quonset Auditorium in order to flesh out the generalizations often made about roadhouses, and touring. This study has drawn primarily on oral accounts collected from a variety of individuals: musicians who performed there, past audience members and people with second hand memories of the Quonset. It also utilizes historical documents relating to the Quonset Auditorium in university yearbooks, newspapers and ledgers from show poster companies.

Introduction

This study grew out of a project for Dr. Michael Ann Williams' vernacular architecture class at Western Kentucky University in which I prepared a National Register nomination form for the Quonset Auditorium. When I was searching for a property to list on the national register, I asked for suggestions from Brent Bjorkman, a folklorist with the Kentucky Folklife Program. Brent told me about the Quonset Auditorium, and explained its history as a roadhouse where famous R&B¹ musicians such as B.B. King and Ike and Tina Turner had performed (Fig. 1). I soon realized that I had already been told stories about the Quonset by Shelly Drummond, a former graduate student from Western Kentucky University, who had learned of the Quonset while researching the African-American neighborhood that it borders.

As I began to ask local people about the Quonset, I became intrigued by their stories. The great Ray Charles; the godfather of soul, James Brown; the diva of gospel, Mahalia Jackson; and many Grand Ole Opry stars such as Hank Snow, Ernest Tubb, and Bill Monroe, as well as lesser known country mainstays such as Wally Fowler, and many others, had all touched the lives of local audiences. The people I talked with recalled seeing these legendary musicians as great moments of their youth, but they also told stories about barn dances, professional wrestling, live bears, bootlegging, and shootings at the Quonset that seemed to hold an equally strong position in their memories.

Although I was first drawn to study the Quonset Auditorium because of its association with famous musicians (yes I was star struck), my interest in the auditorium

¹ Throughout this study, rhythm and blues (R&B), the name that in 1949 replaced the "race" genre listings in *Billboard* magazine to identify African-American popular music will be used in an inclusive manner to include blues, jump blues, as well as R&B. Earl Stewart defines R&B as a popular dance music that developed in the 1940s as a hybrid of folk blues, boogie-woogie blues, jazz, gospel, and swing band music (Stewart 1998:205).

grew stronger as I realized that the local experiences of the Quonset were important in the context of post-World War II popular music, as well as older entertainment traditions such as minstrel shows, carnivals, and barn dances. Even though the Quonset closed forty-three years ago, stories of events that took place there are still told. In the telling of these stories, the memory of the Quonset Auditorium is recreated and kept alive. It is from these narratives that my research began.

This study has drawn primarily on oral accounts that I have collected from a variety of individuals: musicians who performed at the Quonset Auditorium, people who attended concerts and events there, people who were told stories about events at the Quonset, and most significantly from Joe Marshall, the co-owner and co-proprietor of the Quonset Auditorium, who is still alive and well at 79 years of age. I have used leads from the thirty-three interviews² that I have conducted to search out historical records and documents relating to the Quonset, a task that has taken much probing through university yearbooks, newspaper advertisements, and ledgers from show poster companies.

This thesis explores the role of the Quonset Auditorium in Bowling Green, Kentucky, as an example of a roadhouse that played an important, although little recognized, part in the boom of the American commercial³ music industry after WW II. It situates the memories and experiences from the Quonset Auditorium in relation to regional and national movements of the day such as highway development, commercial and popular music, and the civil rights movement. With hindsight, we can see that the Quonset Auditorium stood at a crossroads as regards these social and technological

² The bibliography includes a list of all interviews conducted by the author.

³ Throughout this study the terms commercial and popular have been used interchangeably, although commercial is generally meant to imply the music industry and music intended for a market, and popular is generally meant to imply a broader category of music accepted by the populus.

movements of the post-WW II era. Situating the Quonset Auditorium within these movements, the metaphor of crossroads will be applied throughout this study.

Chapter One places the Quonset within its physical context: along a literal road, the Dixie Highway, and at the boundary of an African-American neighborhood that marks the northern edge of Bowling Green. This location provided access to the commercial tour circuit of both African-American and European-American musicians and provided a bridge between the black and white communities of Bowling Green.

Chapter Two provides a discussion of the history of commercial music and explores commercial music in the post-WW II era on both a national level and on a local level through the story of the Quonset Auditorium. This chapter points to a literature gap regarding the role of roadhouses in commercial music. It also identifies the trend to write about the roots of African-American and European-American commercial music separately by genre. Focusing on experiences relevant to the Quonset Auditorium, Chapter Three details the two main tour networks that utilized the Quonset Auditorium, the African-American chitlin circuit and the country music performer's tour circuit. And finally, Chapter Four looks at the Quonset in the context of the civil rights movement and illustrates how music at the Quonset Auditorium helped to break down racial barriers in Bowling Green, as it did nationally.

Historical Summary

To launch this study, a brief history of the Quonset Auditorium is included below. The Quonset Auditorium was built in 1947⁴ at Bowling Green, Kentucky, by brothers Joe and Kenny Marshall, and Floyd Dunn, three members of the Bowling Green band Joe

⁴Joe Marshall recalls that the Quonset Auditorium was built in 1946 but articles and advertisements in the *Park City Daily News* report it opening in the late fall of 1947.

Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers (Fig. 2). The auditorium was originally built to provide a venue for the Ramblers' weekly square dances and concerts as well as professional wrestling matches that they promoted through the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA). These events had previously taken place at the Bowling Green National Guard Armory. The destruction of the Armory by fire earlier that year prompted the three Ramblers to open up their own entertainment hall (Marshall 2000a). Because of its large size (700 seats / standing room for 1000), and position on the Dixie Highway, halfway between Nashville and Louisville, it was not long before the Quonset Auditorium was booking country, rhythm and blues (R&B), and gospel stars and serving as a roadhouse for touring musicians as well as local entertainment until it closed in 1959.

Below is an excerpt from a narrative by Joe Marshall, one of the proprietors of the Quonset Auditorium, that summarizes the events that lead to both the opening and the closing of the Quonset Auditorium and describes the range of events held at the Quonset during its twelve years of operation. Marshall was speaking as part of a panel of four musicians⁵, who had performed at the Quonset Auditorium when it was in operation, participating in a narrative stage at the 2001 Kentucky Folklife Festival⁶. To help animate Marshall's story, I have augmented his narrative with historical documents that I have found in the *Park City Daily News* from 1947-1959. Although the following narrative is lengthy, it has been included, unedited, because of the incredible detail and contextual information that it provides as a starting point for this study. The role of live radio, touring, the interaction between local and touring musicians, and the shift from

⁵ John Edmonds, Bobby Green, Joe Marshall and Robert Phillips

⁶ See Appendix B for a full transcript of the narrative stage which illustrates the breadth of music styles and events held at the Quonset Auditorium.

radio to television for exposure is introduced in this narrative and these topics will be discussed later in the study. I present you with Joe Marshall on stage:

All right. You know, the Armory was the place there [in Bowling Green] that everybody went. All of the country people from the Grand Ole Opry and people went to the Armory. They had a big floor up there and we [Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers] had dances up there and shows up there. And it burned. Burned to the ground. And we were playing up there at that time. We were all very young.

So one of the announcers at the radio station said, "Let's go down at," uh, "Russellville, that armory building down there." And he rented the armory down there and we were with him down there and we drew the people down there. So my brother and Floyd Dunn who's in the band with us -- us three... we got the big idea that we was going to build us an auditorium (Fig. 3).

So we talked about it. First we pitched a tent. We pitched a tent down there on the corner of Center and, uh, Eighth and Center -- or Eighth and Kentucky, I don't remember it. So we put a floor in that tent and we moved everything in that for the summer. Well we did pretty good; drew in some pretty good crowds down there. Had wrestling matches in there (Fig. 4), and I remember Cab Calloway played there and, uh, one time, and we booked the Grand Ole Opry people in there (Fig. 5) and it was a kind of a popular place to go, to that tent. A storm came up, blew the top off of it about mid-summer and, uh, we just put the walls around it and had bleachers and a floor and called it then The Open Air Arena (Fig. 6). And we played dances in there 'til we like to froze to death. And the crowd stayed with us.

So Floyd and Kenny and I decided at that time there might be a little money in this thing, we didn't know. And, uh, we borrowed some money. Believe it or not, the bank trusted us with ten thousand dollars and, uh, we built the Quonset.

The reason for the Quonset, it was quick, pre-fabbed already (Fig. 7). And, uh, we got together and we were kind of [unintelligible], contractors and carpenters anyway; all of us had worked at that trade some [unintelligible] on the farm. And we put the Quonset up. And after we closed the tent along in October and we got too cold, I believe before Christmas we had the Quonset going (Fig. 8, 9).

Now it wasn't completed but it had a floor in it and we had a big pot-bellied stove in there and some wood and we started there and continued working on it. And, uh, you know, not long we were wrestling in there (Fig. 10) and then we started booking groups in there (Fig. 11) and we had skating (Fig. 12) in there to start with.

And the Mormon Church, they used it every Sunday. We just gave them a key to the place. We knew we could trust the Mormons. And, uh, they came every Sunday we'd clean up after a dance, we'd clean-up good and walk off and leave it and they had a key, they'd use it and we'd never know they'd been there. They left it just like they found it.

And, uh, then Upton Roundtree [local African-American promoter] came along, started booking the blues bands down there. He was the one that brought all of the *big* blues bands -- rhythm and blues bands in there. But then we had revivals in there (Fig. 13), we had a wedding in there, as I said we had skating. We had wrestling in there one night a week (Fig. 14), and you name it. The union people started meeting down there when they had meetings.

And it was open for anybody. If you had twenty-five dollars you could rent the Quonset one night and have what you wanted to have.

But we had a little hamburger joint across the front... we sold a lot of hamburgers to those big crowds, about half-cooked hamburgers, run them across the grill and hand them out the window. There was a big window there (Fig. 15).

And one night back there, for some reason, I don't know who was there, it was one of the black bands and that thing was packed and jammed, somebody shot a pistol off in there and we found it later -- hole in the roof where it went through. And when that gun went off -- we were behind here waiting on them with drinks and hamburgers -- that crowd -- it was just like a big spring that you turn loose -- they came through that window right on top of us. [laughing]
We had people came through that window right on top of us.

Well anyway, that wasn't very funny, but, but I'll never forget that night. Didn't have any trouble -- I don't know, somebody must've been dancing with another one's girlfriend or something and shot the pistol off. But anyway, the Quonset was there from '46, 1946⁷ when we built it and we closed it down in 1959....

But we continued our music. All of that time we went on the radio. [And] we did two years with the Ralston-Purina Company in '62 and '63 [on television]. (Marshall in Green et al. 2001)

After the Marshall brothers sold the Quonset Auditorium in 1959, it was used by its new owners first as a warehouse⁸ and later as an automobile service station. The

⁷ Articles in the *Park City Daily News* indicate the Quonset Auditorium opened in 1947.

⁸ In 1963 John and Thelma Kinnarney bought the Quonset property from Joe and Kenny Marshall and operated a beer distributorship there until 1969 when they sold their distributorship (the Bowling Green Beverage Corp.), to Clark Distributing Co. Clark Distributing continued to use the Quonset as a beer warehouse until they expanded their business later that year. In 1969 John and Thelma Kinnarney leased

building still stands in its original location, a local landmark because of its distinctive architecture and remembrance as “the most going place in town.” (Marshall 2002)

The Quonset Auditorium, one roadhouse among many on the regular tour route of R&B, gospel and country musicians in the post-WW II era, illustrates the important role of roadhouses during a time of growth and change in popular music. The Quonset Auditorium served musicians within both local and national music networks and drew them together as part of a cohesive folk group, or group that shares an identity because of common experience. This study will illustrate how roadhouses in general, and the Quonset Auditorium in particular, brought these music networks together.

their property to the Bale Oil Company, and in 1972 Bale Oil bought the property, and have maintained their tire and automotive business there ever since (Clark 2002; Kinnarney 2002; Warren County Property Valuation Administrator. Property Records and Maps).



Figure 1. The Quonset Auditorium circa 1952 when Johnny Maddox and his Rhythm Masters regularly performed there. Photo courtesy, Joe Marshall.



Figure 2 Publicity postcard produced by WKCT of Bowling Green, KY, 1947. Used with permission, WKCT

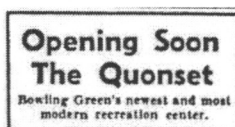


Figure 3 Opening Soon. The Quonset. Bowling Green's Newest and Most Modern Recreation Center. *Park City Daily News* 12/23/1947:7.

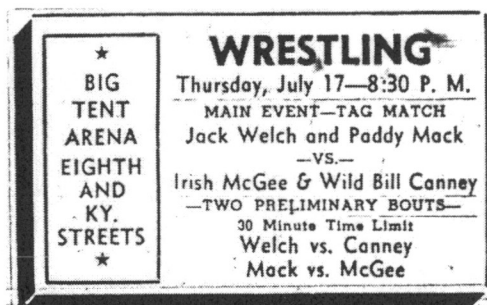


Figure 4 *Park City Daily News* 09/17/1947



Figure 5 WSM Grand Ole Opry Presents Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys plus the Blue Grass Quartet Featuring Chubby Wise, Lester Flatt, Earl Scrugs, Cedric Rainwater, Slim Watts Plus Kentucky Twins. Tent Arena Eighth and Kentucky Streets. *Park City Daily News* 07/14/1947

WRESTLING
OPEN AIR ARENA
 Eighth and Kentucky St.

Figure 6 *Park City Daily News* 09/17/47

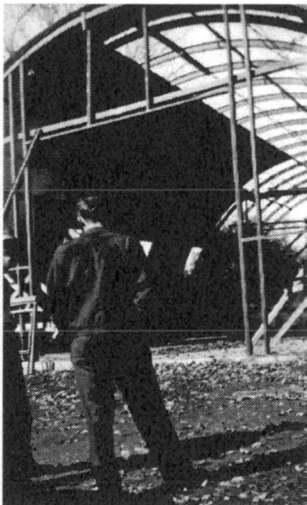


Figure 7 The Quonset Auditorium under construction, Fall 1947. Photo courtesy of Joe Marshall.

NOW OPEN
The Quonset
 Bowling Green's newest and most
 modern recreation center.

Figure 8 *Park City Daily News* 12/28/1947



Figure 9 The Quonset Auditorium shortly after construction in 1947. Photo courtesy, Joe Marshall.

DOUBLE FEATURE
THURSDAY, DEC. 23
DANCING WRESTLING

Round and square dancing starts immediately after wrestling match.

Music By
JOE MARSHALL
 And His
ROVIN' RAMBLERS

2 SHOWS FOR 1 PRICE

The QUONSET

Figure 10 Wrestling and Dancing at the Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 12/21/1948.

The QUONSET
 Brings You A SPECIAL
 ATTRACTION
 FOR THE SATURDAY NIGHT
JAMBOREE
 IT'S
 "Pappy" CLAYTON McMICHEN
 and his
GEORGIA WILDCATS
 A 10 Part Dance Band Withra Swing Band.

**ROUND AND SQUARE
 DANCING**

HOURS 8 TO 12 ADMISSION 75c
 FIRST AND STATE STS.

Figure 11 The Quonset has "Pappy" Clayton McMichen and his Georgia Wildcats For Every Saturday Night Jamboree. *Park City Daily News* 01/01/1948:1; 01/09/1948; 01/16/1948:7.

What You Have Waited For
ROLLER SKATING RINK
NOW OPEN

The Only Skating Rink In The City!

Today, Sun., 2:00 p.m.
 FIRST SESSION TO BEGIN
 2:00 P.M. TO 5:00 P.M.
 2nd Session
 5:45 P.M. TO 8:00 P.M.
 NIGHT SESSION
 8:00 P.M. TO 10:15 P.M.

Admission 25c
 ALL NEW SKATES
 ALL NEW FLOOR

The QUONSET
 CORNER 1ST AND STATE

Figure 12 Roller Skating Rink Now Open The Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 01/11/1948:5



Figure 13 Teuber Evangelistic Party. Mass Rally Each Sunday at 3 P.M. For All People of All Churches. At the Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 12/08/1955:2

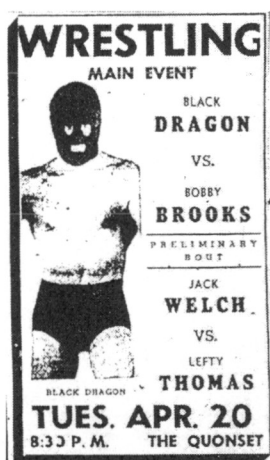


Figure 14 Wrestling Main Event. The Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 04/19/1948.

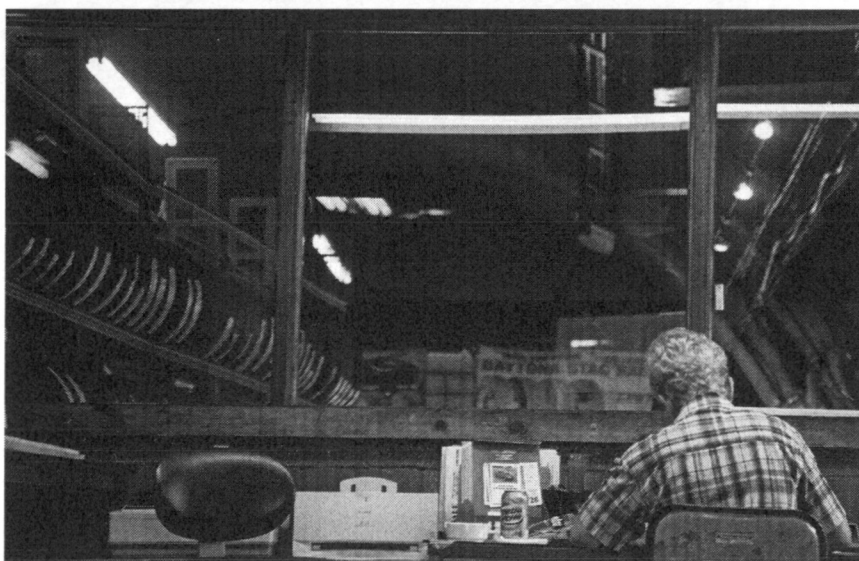


Figure 15 Glassed in concession window at the Bale Tire Center, previously the Quonset Auditorium, 2002. Photo by Fielder Strain.

Chapter 1. “On the Dixie Bee Line”¹

The Dixie Highway - Linking the North and South

In 1947 when the Quonset Auditorium was built along the route of U.S. 31 W, also known as the Dixie Highway, it represented one of the new types of commercial businesses that flourished with the increase of automobile traffic along this route. The highway route had already attracted many commercial enterprises such as filling stations, restaurants, tourist homes and motels since it was dedicated in 1920 (Johnston 1997) and had also become one of the main north-south travel corridors used by touring musicians. As musicians traveled from city to city, they began to perform in roadhouses in between their big destinations so they could make more money and reach a wider audience.

It was no accident that the Quonset Auditorium was so well situated on this major thoroughway in Kentucky linking the north and south. Joe Marshall, builder and proprietor of the auditorium, and wrestling promoter Bob Randall scouted the city by airplane looking for properties that were vacant and well positioned for public access. As a result of their aerial view, they chose the location for the Quonset on the route of the Dixie Highway and in a part of Bowling Green that was accessible to both the African-American and European-American communities (Marshall 2000a)² (Fig 16).

As national road networks such as the Dixie Highway were planned, built and linked in the early twentieth century, opportunities for new cultural traditions were born. By the end of WW II, when commercially recorded music was rekindled after a hiatus during the War, the national road network was well established. If the network of interstate roads had not existed after WW II, road-touring and commercial music as we

¹ Uncle Dave Macon song recorded in 1926 referring to the Dixie Highway. See appendix B for lyrics.

² Professional wrestling was one of the only entertainments in Bowling Green, other than the movies, that was open to both blacks and whites, albeit segregated.

know it would not have developed as it did. The tour industry boomed as a profession, bringing income to musicians and managers, and a market to sponsors such as Martha White Flour, Kentucky Club Tobacco, Crazy Water Crystals, National Life and Accident Insurance Company, Interstate Grocery Company (King Biscuit Flour) as well as many local businesses which sponsored local bands. Little money was made by musicians from live radio performances and recordings, so it was the road tour, and live performances, that kept musicians employed in the pre- and post-WW II days.

Without the highway network, musicians would not have been able to provide distant audiences with live performances of their favorite tunes heard on the radio, and the folk culture of touring would not have developed as it did. We would also likely have been spared the premature deaths of stars such as Bessie Smith, and others who died in automobile accidents while trying to make it to their next gig. For each of these deaths, there are numerous close calls that musicians have had over the years. B.B. King, who has toured extensively since the late 1940s, has had fifteen automobile accidents over the years and has narrowly escaped with his life at times. His two tour buses for his band members, Big Red and Titan, both met their demise on the road, Big Red in 1958 and Titan in 1963 (Danchin 1998:47). Country music's Pee Wee King recalls, "[there were] no superhighways in those days. So the bus used to limp in, and as I say, it's headlights would cross eyeballs a lot of times." (King 1974)

The Quonset Auditorium was well positioned between major music destinations such as Louisville, Nashville, Atlanta and Memphis (Map). Louisville, Atlanta and Memphis were centers for R&B music, and Nashville was developing as "country music USA," building on the popularity of the WSM Grand Ole Opry radio broadcasts of live

shows from Nashville. Both Louisville and Nashville, each within a three hour drive of the Quonset Auditorium, were travel hubs with connections to other destinations as well as being major centers for music themselves. Highway 61, known as “Blues Highway” which meanders alongside the Mississippi River and was a major travel route used by delta blues musicians, had a number of east-west connector routes that provided access to the Dixie Highway and the Quonset Auditorium. Together, Highway 61 and the Dixie Highway provided an important travel corridor for R&B musicians traveling up from the Mississippi Delta and Florida to northern cities, and the Quonset Auditorium serviced both of these tour routes.

The history of commercial music has tended to focus on the major hubs such as Memphis, Nashville, and Chicago, but the small towns and venues that were booked in-between major centers were also important. They provided extra income that helped offset the costs of travel (gas, food, lodging) and they allowed small communities access to their favorite recording artists, which in turn boosted record sales. Both country and R&B music have roots in the south, and it is fitting that the name of the highway the early recording artists traveled most often conjures up images of cotton, folk preaching, tobacco and the “Jim Crow” laws -- all aspects of the regional culture of the south during the post-WW II era.

John Jakle has written about America’s early twentieth century highways as pioneer roads (Jakle 2000). The Dixie Highway was one of these pioneer roads that linked the nation and allowed freedom of movement not available through the railroad and riverboat networks. The Named Highway movement which started in 1915 “had substantial impact in reorienting long distance travel from the nation’s railroads to its

motor roads.” (Jakle 2000:2) These impacts were far reaching. As Jakle details, motor travel freed people from the schedules of trains and allowed them to veer off of the main route and take detours at will. This freedom was important for the early touring industry, as it allowed musicians to customize their route to their audience base and access small communities.

As Ronnie Pugh points out (1998:556), the automobile was the only way to access remote hamlets because trains simply did not run to most of the smaller towns. The automobile and the highway system allowed country and R & B music to become a business, and the highway and the music business grew in a symbiotic relationship. Cultural geographers, sociologists, historians, landscape architects and American Studies scholars have all written extensively about the tangible and intangible impact of the automobile on American Culture. Many studies have looked at transitions in modes of transportation and associated effects on the built environment (architecture, roads) and cultural movements and phenomenon. Although the following studies will not be examined here in detail, they deserve mention because they have offered me a provocative theoretical context in which to base this chapter.

Works such as George Taylor (1951), Geoffrey Hindley (1972) and Albert Rose (1976) provide histories of the American Highway. John Jakle (1990, 2000) traces the development of the automobile, road systems and urbanization in America. Focusing on a single topic associated with roads, Warren Belasco (1979) outlines the changes in accommodations associated with highway development from camping and “gypsying” to pay camps and motels. Thomas Schlereth (1985) and Kris Lackey (1997) discuss the experience of road travel and the historical role of the road in American life. In her study

of architecture in southwestern North Carolina, Michael Ann Williams (1991) has suggested caution in the interpretation of architectural features based on physical attributes alone. She drives home the point that researchers should complement their analysis of the physical with oral historical information, memories and experiences, in order to gain insight into social function, use and meaning from the insiders (emic/esoteric) point of view. I have found use in all of these studies and have drawn on their concepts and data in my work presented here. The bibliographies in the works listed above provide a great resource for further study.

On a local level, immediately relevant to the Quonset Auditorium, the national register nomination prepared by Jan Johnston (1997) entitled “Historic Resources along U.S. 31W in Warren County, 1920-1965” has been immensely useful for specific details and sources relevant to the development of the Dixie Highway in the Bowling Green region.

The Dixie Highway, and highway development in general, has changed development patterns and migration routes in the U. S. Another significant social phenomenon associated with this north/south highway link was the exodus of people from the south as they left their homeland for work in the industrial north. The cause of this exodus was primarily economic, but the highway system played a part by providing a new travel corridor. Chad Berry’s *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles* (2000) looks at the personal and cultural impacts of northern migration on Southerners. While Berry’s book is primarily concerned with white people from the Appalachian regions, black people have also been affected by the industrial pull north. Similar sources about black migration include Carter Woodson’s *A Century of Negro Migration* (1970) and Marcus

Jones's *Black Migration in the United States* (1980). The effects of northern migrations on the music industry will be discussed in Chapter Two.

The Dixie Highway in the Context of Highways in America

Howard Preston in *Dirt Roads to Dixie* (1991) and Martha Carver in her 1995 *SCA* article "Driving the Dixie: The Development of the Dixie Highway Corridor" detail the history of the Dixie and its relationship to auto tourism, and these works have provided valuable background information for this study of the Quonset Auditorium, a roadhouse on the Dixie Highway. The name "Dixie," with its broad regional implications, has been used the longest and most persistently as a highway name in America. Although colloquially the name Dixie Highway has been used to refer to any portion of a route that trends north-south between Florida and Chicago, since the early twentieth century four official routes have utilized the word Dixie. Three of these run north-south, while one extends east-west (Fig 17).

- The **Dixie Highway (western division)** is generally used to refer to the western route which connects Sault Saint Marie, Michigan; Indianapolis, Indiana; Louisville, Kentucky; Bowling Green, Kentucky; Nashville, Tennessee; Atlanta, Georgia; Tallahassee, Florida and Miami, Florida.
- **Dixie Bee Line** is the upper far-western section of the Dixie Highway between Chicago, Illinois and Nashville, Tennessee with the following cities along its route: Chicago, Illinois; Danville, Illinois; Terre Haute, Indiana; Vincennes, Indiana; Evansville, Indiana; Henderson, Kentucky; Hopkinsville, Kentucky; Springfield, Tennessee; Nashville, Tennessee.
- **Dixie Highway (eastern division)** is generally referred to as Dixie East which stretches from Sault Saint Marie, Michigan to Detroit, Michigan; Cincinnati, Ohio; Lexington, Kentucky; Corbin, Kentucky; Newport, Tennessee; Augusta, Georgia; Jacksonville, Florida and terminates in Miami, Florida.
- The **Dixie Borderland Highway** was built in 1919 and linked Savannah, Georgia to San Diego, California, roughly following the U.S.-Mexican border.

(American Automobile Association 1940, 1952; Jakle 2000:5, 7; Preston 1991:57)

The Dixie Highway, represented today by the four routes above, was originally the idea of the Chattanooga Automobile Club, comprising businesspeople interested in attracting tourism to their city. The Dixie Highway Association was created in 1915 as part of the early twentieth-century Named Highway movement that grew out of the “good roads movement.”

The good roads movement began once the automobile became economically accessible to the middle classes in the early part of the twentieth century. National organizations such as the American Automobile Association as well as local Highway Associations supported the movement and drew upon the American ideals of independence and adventure to promote automobile travel and tourism (Johnston 1997:2; Preston 1991:109).

The Chattanooga Automobile Association lobbied for the improvement and completion of the Dixie Highway as a major north-south route. It linked together and renamed a number of shorter preexisting roads and connected them into “a kind of braided stream of marked routes to funnel auto tourists through Chattanooga.” (Jakle 2000:11) The highway route was begun in 1915 and used white and red signs with the initials “DH” on them to mark the route (Fig. 18). These were often nailed to trees or fences along the route.

Prior to the National Road movement in the U. S. which started in 1915, the same year the Dixie was begun, roads were not planned with national travel in mind and were controlled primarily by local private corporations who operated toll roads and provided

stagecoach stops along the roads. The toll roads often followed old trail networks that had been used by pioneers in settling the country.

The Dixie Highway grew from a single route envisioned to link the north and south and increase tourism into a complicated network of roads that passed through ten states (Preston 1991:58). Once the U.S. entered WW I, advocates of the highway argued that the interstate route should receive priority funding because it connected the military camps scattered throughout the South with the rest of the nation, and would accordingly improve national security. According to Howard Preston, this security factor is one of the main reasons that the highway was assisted with federal funding and thus succeeded in linking the north and south (Preston 1991:61).

By 1924, so much confusion existed from all these private highways which often crossed and overlapped each other that the States asked the federal government to coordinate and designate interstate highways. In 1925 the federal government worked out a uniform system of numbering and marking highways. East-west routes were given even numbers and north-south routes were assigned odd numbers displayed on black and white signs. Under this system the western route of Dixie Highway in Kentucky was designated as U.S. 31W; this name and route survive to this day. By the time the Dixie Highway was completed in 1929 it was the longest road network in the U.S. (Preston 1991:62).

Jan Johnston has written about the development of the western route of the Dixie Highway through Kentucky in her National Register nomination entitled: "Historic Resources Along U.S. 31 W in Warren County, 1920-1965" (Johnston 1997). She focuses on the time period between 1920 and 1965 when the route was first dedicated as

a major north-south thoroughway and when the Interstate system was completed in Kentucky and I-65 took many of the travelers away from the route of U.S. 31 W. During the Quonset Auditorium's twelve years of operation between 1947 and 1959, it was situated on the original route of the Dixie Highway, the only north-south road through the region, which contributed to its success as a roadhouse.

U.S. 31W, the portion of the Dixie Highway on which the Quonset Auditorium is situated, began in 1833 with the establishment of the Louisville and Nashville Turnpike. The turnpike was slow to be improved and was maintained in some sections by the state while others operated as toll sections. In 1920 the Dixie Highway was dedicated as a federal highway after the state and its localities had utilized federal matching funds for highway construction and improvements.

The Dixie's routes in Kentucky as elsewhere were chosen to pass by tourist attractions such as Lost River Cave and Mammoth Cave, south and north of Bowling Green, respectively. Entrepreneurs soon built tourist courts, cabins, inns and motels along with restaurants, diners, hot dog stands, filling and service stations, and roadside markets to serve the new interstate travelers (Johnston 1997:2) (Fig. 19).

In the post-WW I era, before desegregation, an informal network of hotels and guest houses developed in black neighborhoods along major travel routes just as white hotels and motor courts sprung up along new commercial strips in response to demand. Mrs. O. A. Moses's family operated a rooming-house for blacks in Bowling Green that came to be known as the Southern Queen Hotel. The Southern Queen got its start in the 1920s shortly after the Dixie Highway was completed. As Moses recalls, "It was just a strange beginning and a strange ending...people who were going down to Florida for the

winter, just happened to come in and ask about where her people could stay, the maids, and the chauffeurs and all.” There were other homes in Shake Rag, a longstanding African-American neighborhood in Bowling Green centered along upper State Street and the route of the Dixie Highway since 1920, that opened their doors to travelers such as “one on Second and Chestnut ... and the Sarah Brown home” on Third Ave (Moses 1996).

By the time that the Quonset Auditorium was in operation in the late 1940s the Southern Queen was well established as a black rooming-house and rooms had been added to the already spacious house for paying guests. The Southern Queen’s link to the Quonset Auditorium comes from its use by touring R&B artists such as Lloyd Price, Ike and Tina Turner, Bobby Bland, James Brown, Ray Charles and others as they and their bands traveled through town (Thomson 2001) (Fig. 20).

The Moses family opened their home when they saw a need for it, but once the civil rights movement of the 1960s had ensured that hotels were accessible to both white and black patrons Mrs. Moses recalls her mother saying, “Now why are we doing this now? We know places we can send them and all.” Mrs. Moses added “And that’s the way we stopped.” (Moses 1996:7). Other towns such as Paducah, Kentucky, had more established hotels for blacks, such as the Hotel Metropolitan, established in 1909, which was used by touring R&B musicians after WW II when they performed in Paducah (Poat 2001:7). And of course big cities like Nashville and Memphis had established hotels and restaurants for African-Americans in black neighborhoods (Fig. 21).

The owners of the Quonset Auditorium took full advantage of its location on the tourist route and turned their concession facility in the front room of the Quonset

Auditorium into a twenty four-hour short-order restaurant to serve travelers. Joe Marshall, the co-owner and operator of the Quonset Auditorium, recalls that Country Music Hall of Fame inductee Little Jimmy Dickens frequently stopped by the restaurant for “a bowl of chili and a hot dog” while traveling the Dixie to make his show dates (2000b). Phil Poteet, a longstanding member of the Rovin’ Ramblers, recalls another Hall of Famer, Hank Williams, Sr., eating at the Quonset’s restaurant while traveling the Dixie (2002). Although neither of these musicians performed at the Quonset (they were too “big-time” for it by the late 1940s), the Quonset Auditorium served their tour route as a convenient road stop where they liked to eat. Knowing the Quonset’s connection to country music must have been an attraction, as well as its prime location on the Dixie.

The house band at the Quonset, Joe Marshall and his Rovin’ Ramblers, had a live black bear that was part of their show -- a twist on the popular horse show that accompanied country musicians such as Hank Snow, Gene Autry, Pee Wee King and others during the singing cowboy craze of the 1930s and 1940s (Green, D. 1978:5). Marshall recalls, “Jerry, the bear was tied-out right in here, somewhere [points to south east side of the Quonset building close to the U.S. 31 W By Pass]. I’d tie him out here for tourists to see him. They’d stop, see the bear.” (Marshall 2000b) (Fig. 22).

Joe and Kenny Marshall also set up a fruit stand in the Quonset Auditorium’s parking lot to service tourists during the summer months (Fig. 23). Marshall describes his marketing strategy in the following anecdote:

So this little fruit stand here had a big open-air thing, stuck way out, you know. Nothing but just a roof over it, ... and on the rafters we had nails everywhere, you could hang stuff.

We hung that thing just full of bananas and very few couldn’t pass without stopping and buying a banana. [laughing] It was -- Sold about half of that load

that Sunday afternoon to people stopping and buying some bananas to eat. (Marshall: 2000b).

Other examples of commercial enterprises and developments that have sprung up along the western route of the Dixie Highway³ include the Wigwam Village autocourt, a semicircle of cabins in the shape of teepees, built in 1934 near Cave City, Kentucky, as a gimmick to attract travelers. Close by, white oak basketmakers living beside the route of the highway began to sell their wares from their homes soon after the route was finished - a tradition that continues to this day.

The Quonset Auditorium was placed on the original route of the Dixie Highway because of the commercial opportunities that it offered, and was fortunate to maintain its position on the alternate route, the U.S. 31 W Bypass, when it was established in 1949 to alleviate congestion in Bowling Green's central business district. According to Johnston, the most profound change in commerce associated with both U.S. 31 W and the U.S. 31 W Bypass was the development of new establishments and forms of commercial architecture (Johnston 1997:5).

Location, Setting and Architecture of The Quonset Auditorium

The Quonset Auditorium is located on the south bank of the Barren River, at the intersection of State Street and U.S. 31 W Bypass in Bowling Green. At the time of construction, U.S. 31 W ran through downtown Bowling Green along State Street. Although the Quonset closed as an entertainment venue in 1959, the building is still

³ commercial developments along the eastern route of the Dixie Highway include Sanders Court and Café, in Corbin, Kentucky, built by Colonel Sanders in the late 1930s and now known as the café where the Colonel perfected his Kentucky Fried Chicken recipe (Kentucky Heritage Council 2002), and Renfro Valley, the home of John Lair's Renfro Valley Barn Dance, which opened along the route of the Dixie in 1939 because of its accessibility to tourists and travelers (Williams 2002).

standing in good condition and continues to mark the north boundary of central Bowling Green.

From the front of the building is a view down State Street (previously U.S. 31 W) towards the Shake Rag Historic District, a close-knit and longstanding African-American neighborhood first established in the late 1800s with a mixture of professionals and working class people that has been described as a little Harlem or Beale Street in the 1940s-1970s (Banks 2002), and beyond to downtown. Looking east and west one can see the U.S. 31 W Bypass that was constructed in 1949 to alleviate automobile congestion from the downtown core. The architecture along the bypass evokes the 1950s era of commercial development. A mixture of older styles of architecture are present along State Street reflecting the growth of Shake Rag and the growth of commercial businesses along the Dixie Highway since it was dedicated in 1920.

There were two filling stations across State Street and a motel across First Avenue/U.S. 31 W Bypass from the Quonset Auditorium; the Riverside Drive-In theatre was located just down the block where the Kroger store now stands. Odis Blanton recalls that Sledge and Sam's Liquor Store was right beside the Quonset in the building where Blanton now has his insurance business. Although the Quonset Auditorium was not a licensed establishment and the proprietors of the auditorium did not sell alcohol in their establishment, Blanton recalls;

You'd come here to the whiskey store and take your bottles down there. They ... would let you take your bottles, put it on the table and they'd serve ice and Cokes. And they'd charge for those, you know, pretty heavy, and plus admission.

Bootleggers were also around, but Blanton recalls that they didn't get much business until after 11:00 pm when the liquor store closed.

Although the Quonset Auditorium is technically a steel arch-rib utility building, it was named after the smaller version of the same building known as the “Quonset hut,” identical in all respects except size⁴. A Quonset hut is one of the earliest types of prefabricated buildings developed in America. Like so many other technological advances, both the Quonset hut and the larger steel arch-rib utility building were developed by the military⁵. The name “Quonset” derives from the Navy base at Quonset Point, Rhode Island, where the prefabricated huts were manufactured during WW II. The huts and utility buildings were designed for the military by the George A. Fuller Company as barracks and equipment warehouses that were durable yet easily assembled and dismantled (Clark, T. 1985; Upton 1998; Walker 1997). The design was a modified version of the British military Nissen hut developed during WW I which also employed sheet metal and an arched roof but, unlike the Quonset hut, it was tied together at the bottom with cables and turnbuckles making it not uncommon for the Nissen huts to collapse.

Quonset huts have been described as “a glorified culvert” (Clark, T. 1985:116) because of their half moon profile and corrugated sheet metal exterior. Their main frame is also made of metal, utilizing semicircular steel ribs, which has made them very durable through time. They are placed on concrete foundations or simply on the ground and can be easily moved or taken apart. During the war, 160,000 Quonset huts and 12,000 utility buildings were produced at the Quonset Point Naval Station and shipped to U.S. bases all over the world (Clark, T. 1985; Williams, C. 2002). Once the war was over, the

⁴ Colloquially, the term Quonset hut has been used to refer to both the Quonset hut proper and the larger steel arch-rib utility building.

⁵ Other developments funded in part by the military include the National Road movement that linked military bases during WW I (Preston 1991), and the construction of the Alaska Highway during WW II. These developments affected the course of later road developments.

buildings were sold as surplus to the civilian market and have endured in vernacular use not only as auditoriums but also as barns, community centers, houses, warehouses, skating rinks churches, and recording studios⁶ just to name a few of their current uses.

The Quonset Auditorium, purchased as an army surplus item soon after WW II, can be seen as an example of a new form of commercial architecture associated with highway development in America. The building attracted tourists because of its distinctive silver color and half moon shape, as well as added features such as a curvilinear 'Art Moderne' recessed entryway, and pink neon sign. The Quonset's streamlined and modern style resembles the diner style, which had become one of the most popular forms of eateries that developed along U.S. 31 W, and other highways in America, during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s (Johnston 1997:29).

Prior to the era of highway development beginning around WW I, most businesses were housed in two-to-three story "Main Street" buildings. The new commercial buildings along highway corridors were extremely experimental, and went through stylistic phases (Kentucky Heritage Council 2002). Many of the autocourts and service stations of the 1930s-50s are still present on the route of U.S. 31 W and contribute to a sense of place and time for the Quonset Auditorium and the historic Dixie Highway.

While some may have seen the Quonset Auditorium as a glorified culvert, Wilhelmina Whitney, whose father, Walter Bird, was a local booking agent for the

⁶ - Bradley Studios, the original Decca studio that in 1955 became the first music business on "Music Row" (the area on 16th and 17th Avenues between Division Street and Edgehill in Nashville, Tennessee) at 804 16th Ave. was a Quonset Hut (Oermann 1998:50-51)

- The Nancy Auditorium in Swainsboro, Georgia started in 1958 by Jim Denny and featuring live music, a radio station studio, skating, and wrestling was also housed in a Quonset Hut. It is still operating today (Denny 2002).

African-American bands, recalled, “It was a beautiful place back then. Colored lights behind the glass blocks were lit up, and it really looked attractive.” (Whitney 2002)

Since the Quonset Auditorium closed in 1959 the only structural alterations to the building have been the installation of large garage doors to facilitate the tire store/automotive shop that it currently houses and the extension of the balcony by about eight feet. It still has its original false front constructed of concrete and glass blocks, and the original plaster veneer covering the concrete blocks shaped to resemble stone masonry is still extant -- giving the impression of a more substantial and prestigious building material than sheet metal.

The main entry designed by Joe Marshall with recessed double doors framed by glass blocks in a curvilinear Art Moderne style popular in the 1940s is still used to this day. The ticket window with a circular cut-out has been replaced with a piece of solid glass, but the window continues to serve as a visual reminder of the building’s original function as an entertainment hall (Fig. 24). Also a reminder of the Quonset’s original function is the rectangular addition on the east side of the building that was constructed in the late 1940s to accommodate bleachers for viewing professional wrestling.

Inside the building there are other features that date to the days of the Quonset Auditorium. The indirect overhead lighting fixtures still hang from the ceiling with bits and pieces of blue plastic hanging from them. As Joe Marshall recalls, “The overhead lights had a covering on the bottom. The sides was where the blue was. And the indirect lighting came both ways [on either side of the covering] and it made the whole building look real pretty. And dim lights and blue.” (Marshall 2002a)

The concession window providing a link between the restaurant and the auditorium is present but has been filled with glass, and the kitchen counter that was part of the restaurant abuts the Quonset's front east wall. Some of the original split cedar paneling used to decorate the walls of the balcony area, reserved for whites during black events, is still hanging in the balcony (Fig. 25). The stage itself has been torn out to accommodate a loading bay, but the shed-roofed addition that was built to accommodate the stage in the late 1940s is still present. These features provide a sense of place for the time when the local and national music legends performed at the Quosnet Auditorium, and can be used to help interpret the building's history.

Although the interior structure has been little altered, some of the decorative features of the Quonset Auditorium are gone including the mural on the side walls of the auditorium, painted in 1951, depicting the four seasons (Marshall 2002c). Jim Kinnarney, whose father bought the Quonset from the Marshall brothers, recalls tearing out the murals when his family took over the building and replacing the wallboard. He recollects that the murals had "bullet holes in it and everything. It was in rough shape." (Kinnarney 2002)

The Quonset Auditorium operated during a time of racial segregation, and the modest African-American entrance on the side of the building that bypassed the restaurant is also extant, serving as a reminder of how history has changed over the past forty years (Fig. 26). The architectural details of the Quonset Auditorium can be used to remind us of the building's rich history. Chapter Four looks in detail at the importance of the Quonset's proximity to the African-American Shake Rag neighborhood for the financial success of the auditorium (diversified clientele kept it afloat over the years) and

in providing the white community of Bowling Green an opportunity to experience live popular African-American music.

The Dixie Highway was a pioneer road opening up the country to tourism and automobile travel. The route also facilitated the development of a network of tour routes and roadhouses used by pioneering commercial country and R&B musicians as they made a living through personal appearances. These tour networks, and their relationship to the Quonset Auditorium, will be the topic of the next two chapters.



Figure 16 Aerial view showing the Quonset Auditorium's placement at the crossroads of the Dixie Highway (crossing the Barren River) and the U.S. 31 W Bypass. The Quonset Auditorium is the larger of the two half-moon shaped buildings. Photo courtesy, Kenny Bale.



Figure 17 Dixie Highway, Eastern and Western Routes, Sault Saint Marie, Michigan, to Miami Florida 1919 (—); Dixie Beeline, Chicago, Illinois, to Nashville, Tennessee 1926 (---). Adapted from Preston (1991:57).



Figure 18 Dixie Highway Road Sign 1915-1925 era. Adapted from Schul 1998.



Figure 19 A segregated rest stop for Greyhound bus passengers on the Dixie Highway between Louisville, Kentucky and Nashville, Tennessee, 1943. Photo by Esther Bubley taken for the Farm Security Administration. Courtesy, Library of Congress.



Figure 20 The Southen Queen Hotel an African-American roominghouse at Second and State Streets in The Shake Rag neighborhood, Bowling Green, Kentucky. This hotel was frequented by touring black musicians until desegregation after 1964. Photo by Wendy Wheatcraft.



Figure 21 Hotel Clark on Beale Street, Memphis Tennessee 1939. The sign advertising “The Best Service for Colored Only” illustrates how services were divided along racial lines in this era. Marion Post Walcott took this picture for the Farm Security Administration. Courtesy, Library of Congress.



Figure 22 Joe Marshall with Jerry the Bear outside the Quonset Auditorium, circa early 1950s. Courtesy, Joe Marshall.



Figure 23 The Marshall's fruit stand in the parking lot at the Quonset Auditorium. Circa late 1940s. Courtesy, Joe Marshall.



Figure 24 Front entrance to the Quonset Auditorium. Note the ticket window on the left. Photo by author.



Figure 25 Original cedar wall paneling in balcony area at the Quonset Auditorium. Photo by Fielder Strain.

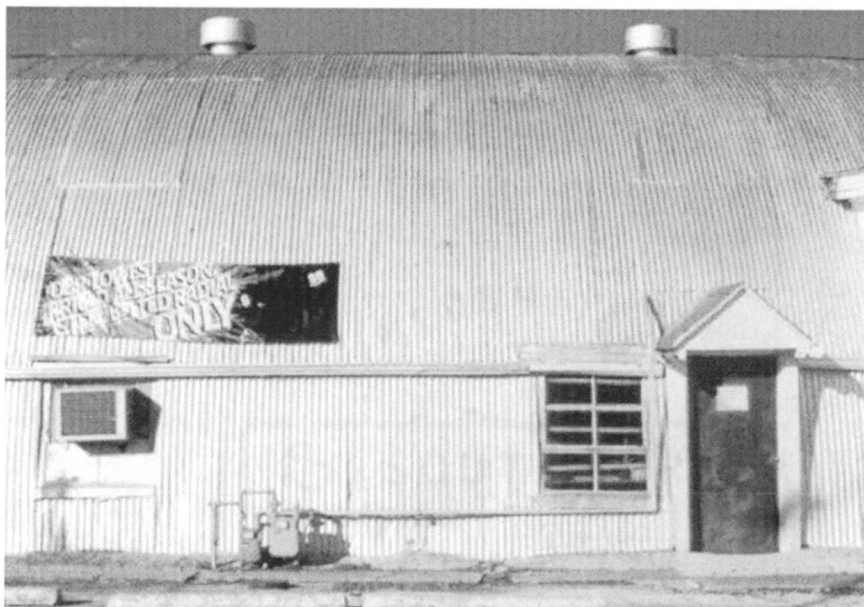


Figure 26 Side entrance for African-Americans at the Quonset Auditorium that bypasses the restaurant at the front of the building. Photo by author.

Chapter 2. A Historical Perspective: The Quonset Auditorium and Commercial Music

Having set the stage for the story of the Quonset Auditorium in relation to the cultural revolution associated with the automobile, this chapter places the study within the context of a communication development that has also had a huge influence across America -- twentieth-century popular music. In the 1920s, as American rural music from both African-American and European-American tradition found a commercial market through recordings, the national road movement also took hold and the automobile became a standard way for commercial musicians to travel to their fans and make a living from personal appearances. As this happened, and in response to a public demand initially created through the promotion tactics of recording labels, a loose network of tour circuits developed that came to be important to the Quonset Auditorium.

The recording industry kick-started touring on a large scale through providing exposure for artists, and opened the doors to commercial music as a mega business. The Quonset Auditorium served both local and national commercial music networks for African-American and European-American musicians and stood at a crossroads bridging the gap between both black and white communities and local and national music networks. In order to situate the Quonset Auditorium in relation to these developments, a brief history of commercial music is provided below.

Historical Perspective

Touring has played a big part in the dissemination of popular music since it began as a commercial enterprise, and it has continued to be important to musicians as a source of income since the recording industry emerged in the 1920s and provided greater exposure for musicians. The first forms of popular music in America that relied upon

touring and live performances date back to traveling minstrel shows and evangelical tent meetings of the mid 1800s when charismatic performers popularized many songs. While religious tent meetings are not thought of as commercial, like the minstrel show they introduced a commercial element to music as they used professional musicians to write popular songs and printed them in books and on individual sheets to sell to the public (Malone 1968:22; Filene 2000:27).

Minstrel shows are considered to be the first distinctly American form of staged entertainment. Beginning in the early 1870s they represent the first major exploitation of folk culture through caricatures of black music and entertainment on the popular stage. Minstrel shows are also one of the longest running forms of entertainment, continuing in the South into the 1960s (Lornell 1993:32). Following on the heels of minstrel shows, vaudeville variety shows became very popular in the early 1900s. Theater chains such as RKO-Pathé, and Keith-Orpheum were built up to provide a loose tour circuit for the vaudeville troops, which featured music stars performing songs written specifically for the stage. While northern pop tunes were the norm on the vaudeville circuit, both African-American and European-American Southern folk talent were often featured. Musicians such as Uncle Dave Macon (white) and Mamie Smith (black), some of the first musicians to popularize folk traditions through recordings, got their first exposure touring the theater circuit with vaudeville shows (Malone 1968:8-9; Evans 2001:42).

Before WW I, commercially recorded music was marketed to the urban, upper class. As the price of both record players and records came down in the late teens, a new market was realized within the working class and rural populations, thus creating a minor boom in record and record player sales. But as radio stations proliferated in the early

1920s, providing free music and information to the rural population as well as the urban, record sales declined. In order to tap in to the working class market with its large population base, record companies began to produce records that catered to rural and working class musical tastes. By the early 1920s A&R men, working for record companies, had gone out in search of local talent to put on records. Through this talent scout process they found string band, blues and gospel music already popular and thriving in rural communities. The record labels developed the categories of “race” records featuring music by black artists that they promoted and distributed to black communities and “old-time” and “hillbilly” music featuring white artists that they marketed to white communities (Lornell 1993:46).

Commercial radio and the recording industry emerged during the same time period, and they quickly developed a symbiotic relationship that continues to this day. “Barn dance” radio shows emerged in the mid 1920s featuring live local talent that advertised the radio station’s sponsors as part of their performance. The musicians were paid minimally or not paid at all for their performances on air, but made up for this shortfall by using their air time to advertise their upcoming performance dates. These advertised shows did provide an income.

Record sales did not do well in the depression years due to decreased spending power as well as competition from radio as radio stations popped up in small cities and towns across the country. This decline in record sales facilitated a surge in the popularity of barn dance radio shows that often relied on local talent and gave the local talent the opportunity to get exposure over the airways and helped them build up an audience base for live performances. Live hillbilly radio programming continued to be popular until the

mid 1950s when television provided serious competition (Lornell 1993:39). Bowling Green got its first radio station, WLBJ in 1941, and Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers were some of the first local talent to be regularly featured by its station sponsors (Marshall 2000a; Nelson 1994). It took some time for radio to serve the African-American market with the same system of sponsored live music performances (late 1940s WDIA in Memphis) even though recordings of black music had become popular in the 1920s; however, once it did the symbiotic relationship between exposure and touring developed for black musicians just as it had for white (Burchett 2001).

Touring and record production slowed down during WW II due to gas restrictions as well as a shortage of shellac and the Petrillo Ban (American Federation of Musicians Union dispute). But by the time the Quonset Auditorium opened its doors in 1947, commercial entertainment was booming and the record industry had found a vastly expanded audience with low and middle income people who were moving from rural areas in the south to city environments both in the south and in the industrial north to find work. Many independent record labels sprang up to exploit the new niche markets for southern music from both black and white traditions that the major record companies were not filling. Black and white music found a popular market as they drew upon songs that created a nostalgic connection to the old Southern country life. Through this expansion, race and hillbilly music that was becoming popular in the 1920s grew into the genres of R&B and country music in the post-WW II years; it is at this point that the story of the Quonset Auditorium begins (Lornell 1993:46).

By the time the Quonset Auditorium closed in 1959, "big time" country recording artists had outgrown the Quonset, and country music was losing some of its

audience base to the child of R&B, rock and roll, which had emerged in the mid 1950s. The golden era of live country radio was over, and television exposure had replaced the sponsored live radio system that had supported both local and national performers. Many “big time” R&B performers had outgrown the Quonset also, but R&B as well as its baby, rock and roll, continued to be popular at the Quonset Auditorium until its closure.

Literature Review

The literature about commercial music has focused more on the impacts of the recording industry than on the performance tour routes and venues that were a daily part of the musician’s lives. Concrete examples of the products of the music business such as billboard chart ratings and discographies have been compiled, analyzed, and written about, but because of the ephemeral nature of tour routes and venues, these have received little documentation or serious scholarly attention.

When I began this study, I expected that the literature about the development of commercial music and the recording industry would deal with black and white music separately. While I have found this to be the trend generally, there are a few books about roots music and early commercial music that do touch upon the development of popular music as it relates to both black and white music and musicians. These include: *Country Roots: The Origins of Country Music* (Green 1976); *Introducing American Folk Music* (Lornell 1993); *Pennies From Heaven: The American Popular Music Business in the Twentieth Century* (Sanjek 1996); *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Filene 2000); and *American Roots Music* (Santelli et al. 2001), and doubtless there are others not cited here. These sources acknowledge the technological

advances such as recordings and radio as well as marketing strategies that have similarly affected all commercial music, be it white or black.

More typically, the literature on commercial music focuses on a particular genre or race, with no acknowledgment of other genres and their shared influences. R&B, blues, jazz, and black gospel, are couched under the category of black music while country music is associated with white musical traditions. The reason for this racial division, I believe, stems from the separate touring, recording, radio, and promotion networks that existed for the two racial groups because of the reality of racial segregation in the South during the development of commercial music.

Because the history of both country and R&B are relevant to this study of the Quonset Auditorium, as a roadhouse serving touring musicians, the literature for both of these genres will be reviewed and discussed. The roots of commercial country and R&B have been chronicled in the literature in similar formats and have been published in similar time periods. First came the publication of historical surveys, followed by the establishment of journals which provided a place for various issues to be explored, and later biographies and memoirs emerged to tell the story of commercial music from a personal, insider's perspective.

The definitive history of country music can be found in Bill Malone's *Country Music U.S.A.* which was first published in 1968, and the equivalent for black music is Eileen Southern's *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, published only three years later in 1971. These books are still respected as the major reference works in their fields, and I have used them extensively in this study.

Since the mid 1970s literature about touring and promoting has appeared primarily in journal articles and in biographies of musicians, and it is there that I have found the majority of my information about tour circuits. In 1970 *Living Blues* magazine was first published by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. Many of its articles are based on interviews with musicians and provide valuable information about venues and touring. In 1971 the Country Music Foundation began publishing the *Journal of Country Music*. Both these journals have published numerous articles chronicling the impact of the recording industry and radio on the music genres of blues and country. Because the articles in these journals are focused on one particular genre, they seldom extend their perspective to acknowledge parallel, and co-existent developments in other musical genres.

An example of this separate treatment of black and white popular music in literature can be seen in Charles Wolfe's 1989 article that appeared in the *Journal of Country Music* entitled: "The Legend that Peer Built: Reappraising the Bristol Sessions" and Pete Golkin's "Blacks, Whites and Blues: The Story of Chess Records" published in *Living Blues* the same year. Taken together these articles tell a more complete story about the early recording industry, and similar developments in the separate genres of hillbilly and race records can be seen. In 1978 Nolan Porterfield did meld the roots of race and hillbilly music in his article that appeared in *Journal of Country Music*, "Mr. Victor and Mr. Peer," although his main focus is the relationship between recordings and country music.

Similarly, the literature about tour networks, promoters, and the business side of touring is presented separately in the journals. The *Journal of Country Music* has

published a number of articles about influential country music promoters such as Jim Denny (Cunniff 1986a, b, 1987) and Bam Bamford (Bamford 1999) that shed light on the tactics used in the business of country music. Although I have not found specific articles about a promoter in *Living Blues*, the question and answer format of articles with musicians often reveals information about important R&B promoters in the post-WW II years, including Don Robey and Dave Bartholomew (Aldin and Lee 1988; Joyce 1977).

Biographies have provided information about the impact of touring on the personal lives of artists, and are a source of information about individual promoters, tour routes and some favorite venues. Generally speaking, the information in biographies is very individualized, reflecting the artist's unique career. When the biographies are viewed together, trends in touring are seen, and it is apparent that the R&B and country musicians relied upon promotion networks separated along racial lines. Upon occasion these networks intersected, as is the case with the Quonset Auditorium.

None of the biographies reviewed for this study mentioned the Quonset Auditorium, although Bowling Green is mentioned as a regular stop in Wade Hall's *Hell Bent for Music: The Life of Pee Wee King* (1996). Other biographies of stars who performed at the Quonset Auditorium examined for this study include Hank Snow's *The Hank Snow Story* (1994); Ronnie Pugh's, *Ernest Tubb: The Texas Troubadour* (1996); Tina Turner's *I Tina* written with Kurt Loder (1986); *Ray Charles: Man and Music* by Michael Lydon (1998); and B.B. King's most recent biography, *'Blues Boy': The Life and Music of B. B. King*, by Sebastian Danchin (1998). This last work has an entire chapter devoted to the chitlin circuit, providing a brief history of the circuit, names of venues important to B.B. King, and details of King's experience of life on the road.

The role of touring in commercial music has been briefly discussed as a sideline in many books. *Hatch Show Print* by Jim Sherraden et al. (2001) is a good example of this. As they write,

Country music professionals made (and still make) most of their income from touring, delivering their music in person to people who paid to see them. While weekly performances on the Grand Ole Opry allowed performers to announce their upcoming tour dates far and wide, there was still quite a bit more work to be done before the stars came to town to perform. Managers, booking agents, radio station managers, advance men, and the stars themselves all played a part in turning the touring process into a formula for success. (Sherraden et al. 2001:58)

Although Sherraden et al. focus on country music in their book, the process they describe for promoting shows applies to black music also. Their focus on country is attributable to their affiliation with the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Although Hatch's bread-and-butter business came from country music during the 1940s through 1960s, they are one of the few companies that also served black promoters. Musicians such as Bessie Smith and black minstrel shows such as Silas Green and Rabbit Foot Minstrels were regular customers. Hatch, like the Quonset Auditorium, opened their doors to black customers during the Jim Crow era in order to broaden their business clientele and stay afloat financially. These are examples of how capitalism has contributed to the break down of racial barriers (see Ch. 4).

Even though some entrepreneurs were cashing in on profits from the black music business, it was not until the height of the civil rights movement in the mid 1960s that R&B musicians found a substantial audience with white crowds, and were booked in white venues. The change began at the first annual Newport Folk Festival in 1959, planned in part by producer and musician Ralph Rinzler, where white America was exposed to the blues. As a result of the popularity of blues music with white audiences at

Newport, record labels began to market blues music to white audiences, who were interested in celebrating the local and authentic as part of the developing folk revival. It was only after this exposure that musicians like B.B. King left the chitlin circuit and began performing for white audiences, both in America and in Europe (Filene 2000:116, 177; Danchin 1998).

The role of roadhouses in the development of commercial music and touring has received spotty representation in music literature. The pinnacles of the tour circuit are well represented, but the smaller venues are often lumped together and referred to simply as “schoolhouses” and “juke joints,” with few specific examples provided. The Grand Ole Opry radio show, housed in a number of venues over the years, has been the subject of numerous books including George D. Hay (1945), Chet Hagan (1989), Myron Tassin and Jerry Henderson (1975), Charles Wolfe (1999) and others. The Renfro Valley Barn Dance is another major country venue that has been written about recently by Pete Stamper in *It All Happened at Renfro Valley* (1999), and by Michael Ann Williams’s book currently in press. Similarly, the most prestigious venues on the chitlin circuit have received attention in books such as *Showtime at the Apollo* by Ted Fox (1983) and *Harlem Heyday* by Jack Schiffman (1984), but there is little representation of the regular roadhouses which were played more frequently and collectively brought in more money on the tour circuits.

The *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, edited by Paul Kingsbury (1998), contains information about the country music business in biographies of pioneering promoters such as J.L. Frank, Jim Denny, Merle Kilgore, Oscar Davis, Hal Smith, and others. In addition to biographies of country music stars and industry stalwarts, which make up the

bulk of the book, the encyclopedia contains a number of essay articles, two of which are particularly relevant to this study: Colin Escott's, "The Talking Machine: How Records Shaped Country Music" and Ronnie Pugh's, "From Schoolhouses to Arenas: A History of Country Music Touring." Again, these essays about the recording industry and touring also have relevance to R&B and black music, but this correlation is not mentioned in the articles because of the exclusive focus on the genre of country music.

Peter Guralnick's *Lost Highway* (1979), a collection of biographical sketches, and Benjamin Filene's *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (2000) are two relatively unusual works that discuss black and white musicians under the same cover. *Lost Highway* is relevant to this study because it looks at the emotional impact of touring on the personal lives of both black and white recording artists, some of whom performed at the Quonset Auditorium, such as Hank Snow, Ernest Tubb and Bobby Bland. The musician's experience of the road is a topic often overlooked in the discussion of commercial music, and Guralnick provides a nice introduction to this topic. Although Guralnick brought black and white music genres together metaphorically, the story of the Quonset Auditorium shows how these genres and musicians literally shared the same auditorium, and provided a bridge between the white and black communities of Bowling Green. Chapter Four focuses on race relations at the Quonset Auditorium and the role popular music has played in breaking down racial barriers.

Romancing The Folk uses information from articles in *Living Blues*, *The Journal of County Music*, as well as other sources to offer an insightful look at motivations behind the recording industry. Filene identifies capitalism as a major factor in the development of American popular music. He looks at hillbilly and race music in light of marketing

strategies that both cater to and created a new market with displaced southerners who had left the rural South in order to find work, capitalizing on nostalgia for the South and southern traditions (2000:78).

The subject of many blues and country songs relate to the effects of displacement from the South. A few country song titles include “Are You From Dixie (‘Cause I’m From Dixie Too)” by Jack Yellen, “Blue Moon of Kentucky” by Bill Monroe, “My Southern Sunny Home” and “The Little Old Log Cabin” by William Shakespeare Hays, and “South of Chicago” by Charlie Feathers (Malone 1968). Blues/R&B song titles about displacement include “I Feel Like Going Home,” “Down South Blues,” “Goin’ Down South Child / This Weather Here’s Too Cold,” and “Where’s My Woman Been” by Muddy Waters (Filene 2000:95).

Filene discusses the A&R men, Ralph Peer, generally associated with promoting country music, and Leonard Chess, associated with R&B, together, and draws parallels between their work in searching out southern rural talent for recording. In the majority of the literature, Peer is discussed in relation to country music and Chess is discussed in relation to black music. Although Peer primarily scouted for hillbilly musicians he did record some African-American musicians and coined the term “race records” in the early 1920s to identify black music for his black target audience.

The success and popularity of hillbilly and race music is attributed, by Filene, to the following factors: recognizing an audience niche, scouting for talent that could fill the niche, developing extensive regional distribution networks for their recordings, and employing the “payola,” the pattern of bribes for services that determined radio airplay. Just as today, in the forties and fifties record sales depended heavily on radio exposure

(Filene 2000:104). In a word, record producers became very good at distributing and promoting their product.

Another source of information about life on the road for black musicians is *Let The Good Times Roll* a thirteen part radio series that chronicles R&B from its roots in the 1940s to the politically charged Soul era of the 1960s. This audio piece includes over 300 interviews with music promoters, industry executives, disc jockeys, musicians and fans (www.rhythm-n-blues.org). These first hand accounts provide insight about the realities of the recording industry for African-American people in the post-WW II years.

On a local level, James Nelson (1994) has written about the role of live country music performances on radio in the Bowling Green area and their contribution to commercial country music. Because of the tendency of country music scholarship to focus on phonograph records, careers of many unrecorded artists who performed live on radio have been overlooked. Nelson uses Joe Marshall as one of his key examples, but keeps his focus on live radio, barely touching on Marshall's role in country music promotion at the Quonset Auditorium. This work provides a concise review of the literature about the relationship of folk and commercial music traditions, and the reader is referred to Nelson's monograph for a discussion of this literature. Extending Nelson's thesis beyond country music and radio, we can see that many of the local black musicians who regularly performed live at the Quonset Auditorium, and in the region, have also been overlooked because they did not record or perform on live radio, even though they played an important role in the local commercial music scene.

From the time that music became a profession in America, the main income for performers has come from touring, yet very little has been written about tour circuits and

even less has been written about specific venues on these circuits. The Quonset's placement in the tour circuits of country and R&B performers, and the difference between these circuits, will be the topic of the following chapter.

Chapter 3. Big Names in Small Places: Touring the Dixie Highway

Two main tour circuits brought popular radio and recording artists through Bowling Green and to the Quonset Auditorium. These are the chitlin circuit¹, a network of black theaters and clubs, and the country performers circuit, a network of white schoolhouses, auditoriums and theaters. These tour circuits had been developing since the 1920s but really boomed after WW II when the recording industry targeted the popular market. Shows on these circuits drew on different booking agents and promotion networks and very often had access to different venues because of racial segregation. Although the Quonset Auditorium served as a venue for both the chitlin and the country circuits, the advertising avenues available for black and white shows at the Quonset reflect the differences between the tour circuits.

Country promoters had access to Bowling Green radio stations WLBJ and WKCT as well as *The Park City Daily News* to announce upcoming dates for the Quonset Auditorium and to access their audience base, which was primarily white. Because Bowling Green did not have a black paper or a black radio station, these avenues of advertisement were not available for R&B promoters, and they relied primarily on the distribution of revue placards to get the word out to the black community. Although country promotion networks used posters also, the country shows were placed in white businesses while black show posters were placed in black businesses and clubs, thus maintaining the separation of the races and reflecting the segregation norms of the Jim Crow era.

¹ Chitlin is a common spelling of chitterlings, a soul food delicacy made from hog intestines that has come to symbolize southern black culture.

The archival record of shows (newspaper advertisements, show posters) relevant to this study is more abundant and currently more accessible for country music than R&B, evidenced in the paucity of advertisements for R&B shows included in this study. Materials at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum archive are accessible to researchers, but the blues archive at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture has a large body of material that is uncatalogued at this time, and therefore closed to researchers. Similarly, materials at the Rhythm and Blues Foundation have not been accessible because of a shortage of personnel at their institution. Because of these factors, this study draws upon archival information about the country music network only.

As in other sections of this study, this chapter will draw on the oral accounts from local musicians and community members to illustrate the role of the Quonset Auditorium, and roadhouses in general, in the development of the popular music business. It will provide particulars from the Quonset Auditorium to flesh out generalizations. To provide as much breadth as possible, this chapter mixes archival and oral historical sources with published information about music stars who performed at the Quonset Auditorium.

The Quonset Auditorium represents a crossroads where diverse groups of people and different forms of commercial media intersected; country stars could perform one night, and pack the place with a white audience, and the next night could see a predominantly African-American audience for a touring R&B star or a popular local R&B band. It also represents a crossroad where both locally and nationally popular musicians interacted and shared experiences as part of the folk culture of touring.

By examining the history of the Quonset, and its role in the local community as well as the larger regional and national network of roadhouses, this chapter will illustrate how vital the circuit of roadhouses was to the artists on tour as well as local musicians. After all, touring and performing have been the primary support for commercial musicians throughout the history of commercial music. This chapter starts by placing the Quonset Auditorium within the country music tour network and then moves on to place it within the chitlin circuit.

The Country Music Scene in Bowling Green - “If You’re Down By The River Drop In”²

When the Quonset Auditorium opened its doors in 1947, it fit right into a network of roadhouses where country musicians performed and filled the gap left when the National Guard Armory burnt down in late 1946. Big name country acts had performed at the Armory, the Bowling Green High School, VanMeter Auditorium, Beech Bend Dance Pavilion, or in tents. Lesser known bands performed at clubs such as the Boots and Saddle, Club Dixiebelle, and Lost River Cave on Nashville Road; Manhattan Towers, the Old Fort, and the Orange Bar on Old Louisville Road; The Mansard Hotel and Hunt’s Oyster Bar (also known as “Rough and Ready”) on Main St., and others³. As the 31 W Bypass was developed after 1949, other clubs and bars sprang up along the new travel route. Because the surrounding counties are dry, Bowling Green was then and still is a watering hole in a desert, so to speak, and drew people from the surrounding counties.

² The daily sign off slogan used by Joe Marshall on WKCT radio during his sponsored show where he was able to advertise events at the Quonset Auditorium (West 2002).

In the post-WW II years, Bowling Green was known as “a going place” (Conner 2001) for entertainment and even drew soldiers from Camp Campbell, 73 miles away even though Clarksville and Nashville were closer to them (Poteet 2002). Music was not the only incentive to visit Bowling Green. Pauline Tabor’s bordello, established in 1933, on Clay Street had become very popular and was part of Bowling Green’s draw for the white soldiers from Camp Campbell (Tabor 1971:132). Similarly, Miss Bell’s Good Time house on Park Street drew black men and Soldiers to Bowling Green, and provided gambling and bootlegged home brew as well (Cosby 1990). Both of these houses of ill repute were located in walking distance from the Quonset Auditorium. Today, this area is still the red-light district of Bowling Green.

By the time the Quonset Auditorium was built in 1947, Joe Marshall and the Rovin’ Ramblers had already built up an audience base through their exposure from performing regularly on the local radio stations WLBj and WKCT since 1941. When not busy on air the Rovin’ Ramblers had played regular square dances in area schoolhouses and armories and even traveled in their listening area with a tent show modeled after the Grand Ole Opry tent shows (Marshall 2000c). Joe Marshall recalls, “[it was] easy to book. ‘Cause see, they’d hear us on the radio. We were radio stars.” (Marshall in Nelson 1994:54)

Local radio played a major role in the success of the Quonset Auditorium. Joe Marshall and the Rovin’ Ramblers hosted a daily radio show on Bowling Green’s WKCT while the Quonset Auditorium was in operation. During their broadcast the Ramblers’ performed live and were able to build their local fan base. They took the opportunity to

³ According to Odis Blanton, during the 1940s and 1950s there were 23 taverns along Main Street in Bowling Green, between the downtown square and the railroad tracks, which served the demand for

announce both their band's performance schedule and the headlining recording artists they booked at the Quonset Auditorium. When the opportunity presented itself, Marshall would bring the recording stars who were touring through Bowling Green onto their radio show, so they could plug their recordings and concerts on air (Marshall 2000c).

For a time, Joe Marshall had two groups of the Rovin' Ramblers performing at once, increasing their public exposure. One of the groups stayed in Bowling Green and did local radio and the gig at the Quonset, and another traveled to the small towns in the listening area such as Hopkinsville and Russellville. In 1949 and 1950 the satellite group of the Ramblers' had a permanent gig at the Palace Hotel in the resort town of Red Boiling Springs, Tennessee, and broadcast live from a radio station there, increasing their exposure even more (Green, B. 2002).

Country Music Stars at the Quonset Auditorium:

Ernest Tubb, Wally Fowler and the Oakridge Quartet (later the Oakridge Boys), Cowboy Copas, Paul Howard, Pee Wee King and the Golden West Cowboys, Clayton McMichen, Johnny Maddox, Hank Snow, Howdy Forrester, Milton Estes with the Martha White Flour tour, The Jordanares, Bill Monroe, both with and without Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, and others country stars all performed in the Quonset Auditorium while they were on tour.

WSM had its own artists service bureau that booked dates for members of the Grand Ole Opry, but most musicians used their own managers and booking agents and developed their own niche with audiences, tour routes and venues. This direct approach was more profitable for them because the artist services bureau charged steeply for their

service. The list of influential country music promoters who promoted and booked shows at the Quonset Auditorium includes Jim Denny, J.L. Frank, and Hal Smith.

All of these promoters tapped into local talent and local promotion avenues when arranging tour dates. In Bowling Green they utilized Joe Marshall, with his connections developed through booking talent for WKCT radio, as well as his local popularity as a radio personality and performer to book acts at the Quonset and at other venues in the region. The following excerpt from *Hatch Show Print* by Sherraden et al. (2001) reflects Joe Marshall's experience as a regional showman and positions him and the Quonset Auditorium within a promotional trend that brought local and national commercial music networks together.

Local radio stations did their part establishing artist service bureaus to facilitate booking and promoting. Advance men adapted the time-honored tactics of front men for minstrel shows, distributing show posters and handbills as well as arranging radio and newspaper ads and coverage. (Sherraden et al. 2001:60)

Grand Ole Opry member Pee Wee King, in an interview with Douglas Green, describes how this promotion trend (a tactic still utilized) was encouraged by his manager, J.L. Frank in the 1930s: "What we did was make the local disc jockey, the popular disk jockey, the emcee of the show, introducing all of the acts on the show." (King 1984b) This system of promotion served the needs of both the local and national star. Managers would pay the disc jockeys to emcee, thereby gaining local fame, and the emcees would take the opportunity to plug their show and station. As King discussed with historian John Rumble in an interview,

PK: That was the common denominator for these small towns. Sometimes the local disk Jockey was also an artist in that town and he felt kind of slighted if you didn't ask him to come to the show and act as an emcee. Because he felt he was important, as important as the stars of the show, and he may even be a recording artist.

So Mr. Frank would hire him on that Sunday or the day we had the show and say, "Look, I want you to be our guest and also be the announcer for our show." Well that made the boy important in his own hometown. That he had the Grand Ole Opry stars that he could introduce. And it served his purpose

JR: Well he naturally gave you some plugs, I guess

PK: All week. A couple weeks even before we got there (King 1985).

The narrative above describes the situation at the Quonset Auditorium with Joe Marshall and his role as a radio personality. Marshall had an added incentive to book acts in Bowling Green once he opened up the Quonset Auditorium, because he was able to reap the profits from the shows instead of turning them over to another venue operator. There is no doubt that Joe Marshall's status as a local radio personality helped him draw musical acts to his auditorium and placed him and the Quonset Auditorium in a good position within the country tour formula of the day.

Malone attributes the upsurge in the Grand Ole Opry's popularity in the early 1940s to the rise of independent promoters who recognized the financial possibilities of the country music business (Malone 1968:185). Pee Wee King, reflecting on the same upsurge states, "country music became popular after WW II because boys came back, with exposure to country music [from the Camel Caravan] and because of patriotism" (King 1985). After WW II, J.L. Frank pioneered the expanded country road show that featured a number of artists on the bill that he developed for the USO Camel Caravan during the war.

This change affected venues like the Quonset Auditorium because it was not big enough to accommodate the large variety shows. The Quonset served as a roadhouse where country stars could make a few extra dollars while traveling between their bigger

shows and Nashville for weekly performances on the Grand Ole Opry. It was not a main destination, but a convenient roadhouse along their tour route. For an example, J.L. Frank managed artists such as Roy Acuff, Texas Ruby, Ernest Tubb, Minnie Pearl, and Gene Autry as well as Pee Wee King. Of these stars, only Ernest Tubb and Pee Wee King performed at the Quonset Auditorium. The other artists had other venues and routes that worked better for them, and Frank did what worked the best in each situation. Pee Wee King had developed a following in Kentucky from his extensive touring since the mid 1930s, and liked to keep it up.

Many of the country musicians based out of the upper south used Hatch Show Print in Nashville to make their promotional posters. The Hatch Show Print business records, spanning the time from 1924 to 1965 and archived at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, provide a valuable resource for reconstructing the tour schedule of individual artists who used their services, as well as providing information about different musicians and groups that used specific venues.

In reviewing the Hatch Show Print records, I found the following twelve poster orders for engagements at the Quonset Auditorium:

- Jimmy Self with Martha White Flour Company, June 8, 1949 (Sheet 2)
- Martha White Flour Company Nov. 11, 1952 (Sheet 22)
- Milton Estes with Grandpa Jones. May 4, 1947 (Sheet 9)
- Milton Estes June 9, 1948 (Sheet 18)
- Mr. Lloyd "Cowboy" Copas. Jan 27, 1950 (Sheet 21).
- Pee Wee King and his Golden West Cowboys. Feb 27, 1948 (Sheet 56).
- Paul Howard. Mar 26. 1948 (Sheet 40).
- Paul Howard June 25, 1948 (Sheet 42)
- Bill Monroe Feb 6, 1948 (Sheet 67)
- Bill Monroe Jan 19, 1949 (Sheet 77)
- Bill Monroe Aug 11, 1950 (Sheet 98)
- Bill Monroe Feb 19, 1955 (Sheet 127)

Although the Quonset Auditorium was not the only venue in Bowling Green used by country musicians during the life of the Quonset Auditorium, based upon Hatch advertisements for shows in Bowling Green it was booked three times more often than other venues collectively⁴. The Quonset Auditorium had the advantage of being part of the promotion network that Joe Marshall had built up as a local radio personality, promoter, and auditorium owner.

The Hatch records illustrate some of the booking changes that took place at the Quonset Auditorium over its twelve years of operation from 1947 to 1959. During the Quonset's early years, Grand Ole Opry stars were booked relatively regularly, but as the stars grew in popularity and as the variety show format took hold, they outgrew the Quonset Auditorium. For instance, after 1952, only two Grand Ole Opry acts that used Hatch advertising were booked at the Quonset. The advertisements also indicate that there was usually only one Grand Ole Opry star featured at the shows at the Quonset, a far cry from the larger variety packages that were being booked in larger venues during this time period.

In addition to advertising with show posters and radio announcements, many country music promoters also took out local newspaper advertisements. A search of the Bowling Green paper, *The Park City Daily News*⁵, found newspaper advertisements for all of the above Hatch advertised events except three⁶ (Figures 29, 47, 17, 36, 37, 12, 13, 18, 19, 10, 25, in Appendix C). Advertisements in the paper were found for touring

⁴ Other Hatch ads in Bowling Green during the Quonset's reign include: The WSM tour, Van Meter Auditorium June 21, 1957; Milton Estes, Kroger Store in Bowling Green, Dec 18, 1948; Cowboy Copas, Lost River Drive-In Theatre in Bowling Green, Sept 2, 1954; Bill Monroe, Beech Bend Park April 17, 1949.

⁵ See Appendix C for *Park City Daily News* advertisements relevant to the history of the Quonset Auditorium between 1947-1958.

⁶ Paul Howard June 25, 1948; Bill Monroe Aug 11, 1950 and Feb 19, 1955.

musicians and groups that did not use Hatch -- such as Clayton McMitchen, Joe Templeton, The Tads, Johnnie Maddox, Cliff Gross and the Texas Cowboys, Uncle Bozo's Big Radio Jamboree⁷, Bob Jennings and his Corn Millers, Jimmy Jones Orchestra with Russ & Jo Fisher⁸, Phil Doto, Howdy Forrester, Ace Dinning, Ted Weems, Grand Ole Opry Stars Wally Fowler and Curley Bradshaw as well as regular advertisements for the Quonset's Saturday night dances (Figures 6, 44, 45, 46, 14, 22, 47, 43, 40, 41, 42, 51, 24, 32, and 16, 21, 27, 30, 31, 34, 35, 39, 43, 45, 53 in Appendix C).

These advertisements show the mixture of musical styles performed at the Quonset Auditorium, and also indicate the range of talent from local (Uncle Bozo, Ace Dinning, Phil Doto?, Joe Templeton?, The Tads?) to regionally known radio personalities (Russ and Jo Fisher—Renfro Valley Barn Dance, Bob Jennings -- Nashville's WLAC) and nationally known recording artists (Howdy Forrester, Ted Weems, Clayton McMitchen, Johnnie Maddox, Cliff Gross, Wally Fowler, Curley Bradshaw). The Quonset was not a specialty club, catering to one genre of music as did some other Bowling Green clubs such as the Boots and Saddle and the Golden Branding Iron; instead it booked popular acts from a variety of genres, and in this way expanded their audience base.

These advertisements also show us some of the changes in popular music that took place between 1947 and 1959. By the mid 1950s the majority of the Quonset Auditorium's ads were for dance bands and orchestras, a shift from the focus on country

⁷ Uncle Bozo Carver met Pee Wee King when King was performing in Glasgow, Kentucky, and toured with King and his Golden West Cowboys for a short period (Hall 1996:122). See Lawson (1965) for a history of Uncle Bozo Carver's life and career.

⁸ Russ and Jo Fisher started out on radio in Bowling Green in 1941, and often performed with Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers as well as Odis Blanton and his Blue Star Rangers. In the early 1950s they were hired as regulars on the Renfro Valley Barn Dance where they received widespread acclaim (Nelson

music in the Quonset's early years. We can also see how popular music affected the Quonset's house band as it shifted from barn dance music to swing band dance music in 1951 to satisfy its target audience, primarily people from the surrounding counties and university students. By 1956, they were advertising "The Quonset's New Band" with no mention of square dances or barn dances.

While these historical documents are important, the majority of advertising for shows was done over live radio by Joe Marshall during his daily radio broadcast (Marshall 2000a); thus we must avoid presuming that the printed material is representative of all the musicians who performed at the Quonset Auditorium. The archival material has been useful as a metonym of narrative as well as providing tangible evidence of performances at the Quonset. The material has often triggered memories and stories of the Quonset for many informants in this study.

The Quonset Auditorium served as a roadhouse for a variety of acts, both locally known and nationally known. It sat at a crossroads, connecting these levels of the country music tour circuit. For the Grand Ole Opry stars it was a fill in venue used to make a few extra bucks while passing by on the way back to Nashville and the Opry. For lesser known acts, the Quonset was a large venue that provided them with exposure and income.

PeeWee King, one of the first big stars of the Grand Ole Opry, recalls, starting out performing in schoolhouses in the 1930s, "and if you were hot enough then they would start booking you in the theaters...and then the auditoriums (King 1984a). It was at an auditorium in Bowling Green, Kentucky in the mid 1930s where King got his first chance

1994:47). See Simunick (1997), an interview with Jo (Fisher) Simunick, for more info on the Fisher's career as Kentucky entertainers and radio personalities.

to host a show, and this event kicked off his career as a country music personality and musician. As he recollects,

Frankie Moore was the emcee [for the WHAS Crazy Water Barn Dance]. Now the reason that comes to my mind so great was, that was my first chance to emcee a show! Frankie got sick and had to have an operation and says, "Pee Wee, I want you to emcee the show." That was my first time ever for the Barn Dance...

I remember my break was at Bowling Green. We played the big auditorium⁹ down there and man, I was sky high at that time. I got to emcee the show. And from then on was when Frankie took an interest in me and says, "You might as well learn how to talk and know how to do these things." Made the format out and everything else. First a happy time. And that's right...then close with a religious song. Maybe at the end of the Crazy Water Barn Dance we would have the whole Barn Dance on the stage and singing, "I'll Fly Away" or whatever song as a gospel song. (King 1984a)

King's break in Bowling Green in the mid 1930s places it as an important link on the country tour circuit for some time before the Quonset Auditorium was built. Over his career, he traveled the Dixie Highway often. As he recalls, "We would drive from the Grand Ole Opry at 11:30 PM and would head to Jacksonville Florida or Pennsylvania or Ohio." Part of his success was catering to his audience's preferences. King would perform the hits in the auditoriums and the classics in the smaller towns (King 1984b). Although King left the Grand Ole Opry for a career on television, this shift did not keep him off the road. Between 1952 and 1957 he traveled constantly between Chicago, Cleveland and Louisville by car in order to make four separate T.V. performances a week.

The careers of Pee Wee King and Joe Marshall have some parallels, but on different scales. They both started on radio and toured within their listening area. They used their popularity to secure regular gigs for some time, King on the Grand Ole Opry,

⁹ Likely the old Armory on Chestnut Street, the Bowling Green High school, or Van Meter Auditorium, the only auditoriums in Bowling Green before construction of the Quonset Auditorium.

and Marshall at the Quonset Auditorium, and they both left radio for television. While Joe Marshall never broke out of his local circuit around Bowling Green, King was able to tour nationally because of his work on network radio such as Louisville's WHAS and Nashville's WSM.

Joe Marshall got to know a lot of music stars because of his position as a local radio personality, showman and auditorium owner. He knew promoters such as Hal Smith, and musicians such as Bill Monroe and Wally Fowler personally and maintained relationships with them after the Quonset closed. Marshall's familiarity with these stars came from his role as a promoter and local showman. As Joe recently recalled,

I played a lot of shows with Bill Monroe. He came here [to the Quonset Auditorium] several times. And we would go other places and book together. *I* would book him. Now I didn't play in his band. I didn't play at the Grand Old Opry. But he used our publicity from this station [WKCT] and we got a little money. Of course he got the main event, and we'd open. We were the opener for him many times. And I've introduced him many times on the stage. (Marshall 2002b) (Figures 10, 25 in Appendix C)

Bill Monroe toured extensively from the mid 1930s until the 1990s and recalled in a 1993 interview with John Rumble, "I never did turn down any dates, I don't think." The life on the road affected many artists material, and Monroe was no exception in this regard. "Mighty Dark to Travel," "Can't You Hear Me Calling," "Dark As The Night," and "I'm On My Way Home" are all songs about Monroe's experience of life on the road. Monroe recalled,

The song "Heavy Traffic Ahead" came from a joke about a road sign near Sparta Tennessee, where Lester [Flatt] lived, that said, "Heavy Traffic Ahead." But there wasn't a lot of traffic over there and you all kind of got a laugh out of that.

"I'm Blue, I'm Lonesome" That's a melody I had, and Hank Williams [Sr.] wrote the words to that.... You see, we was traveling...and was coming home or something. (Monroe 1993)

One of the very last performances of Bill Monroe with his influential band configuration which included Chubby Wise, Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs and Cedric Rainwater (Howard Watts) was at the Quonset Auditorium on February 6, 1948¹⁰ (Fig. 10 in Appendix C). The Quonset Auditorium had just opened a little more than a month previously, and this was the first big show at the Quonset Auditorium with a Grand Ole Opry star. And it looks like it must have been one heck of a show! Bill Monroe with his classic band, Bradley Kincaid, one of the first country music radio stars from WLS in Chicago, and Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers the local radio presence kicking off the show.

By sharing the stage with the stars, and helping with exposure and advertising, local musicians became part of the folk culture of touring. Interaction and membership in the touring musicians' folk group can be seen in the following story told by Bobby Green and Joe Marshall (G=Bobby Green, M=Joe Marshall),

G: And we did quite a few of them: Bill Monroe,...Ernest Tubb. One time we played, uh -- went from there [the Quonset Auditorium] over to the radio station. There was some kind of a charity drive going on in Bowling Green and, uh, Bill Monroe -- somebody offered a hundred dollars, Bill Monroe would sing something. We went over and played for him and he wanted to play in B Natural chord. And Lordy Mercy! that was foreign to us. And [laughing] we, but we went through it and when he got through he said, "Folks, my regular band wasn't here." They'd already gone to Nashville. [crowd laughs]

M: He turned around to us, said, "Boys, B Natural, B Natural." None of us knew where B Natural was! [crowd laughter] (Green and Marshall in Green et al. 2001)

¹⁰ Folklorist Neil Rosenberg has traced the last days of the legendary Blue Grass Boy combination, including Flatt and Scruggs. He cites a show in Huntington West Virginia on January 25th as one of the last with the complete ensemble listed above. By February 1st Chubby Wise had left to host a radio show of his own, and by the beginning of February, Monroe had been served a two week notice by his whole band (Rosenberg 1983:74-78). The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum Archive has no record of who performed with Bill Monroe on his February 7 and 14 appearances on the Grand Ole Opry, but Tom Ewing (2002) who has been researching Bill Monroe's band history thinks that Flatt, Scruggs and Watts were likely still performing with Monroe when he performed at the Quonset on February 6, 1948, and that Scruggs continued with Monroe until the end of February.

Marshall recalls that Bill Monroe's music was already in a class of its own back then, before bluegrass had been defined as a genre, and that few musicians could play Monroe's style (Marshall 2002c). Gordon Terry (1975), one of Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys in the late 1940s, remembers learning "Muleskinner Blues" and "Georgia Rose" from a record. "I had to tune my fiddle to the record because I didn't know the B natural tuning, just knew C, " so the Ramblers were not alone.

As Bill Monroe pioneered a new musical genre, the Rovin' Ramblers catered to the pop market because it drew the regular crowds from local universities and near by army bases. The following incident recalled by Bobby Green indicates the crowd's influence by the popular,

I remember when he [Bill Monroe] was there at the Quonset one show, he said, "Any requests? Any requests?" 'Course he was expecting "Mule Skinner Blues," a little "Footprints in the Snow," his numbers.... "In the Mood" was popular back in those days, and.... Well then somebody hollered, "Bill, play 'In the Mood!'" He said, "I don't guess any one of us fellers knows that there tune, feller." He just went right on in [to one of his songs]. [crowd laughs] (Green in Green et al. 2001)

Joe Marshall knew Bill Monroe personally because of Monroe's connections to Bowling Green, one of the closest cities to his home in Rosine, Kentucky, but he also came to know other country music stars because of his role as a local radio personality, musician and auditorium proprietor. The following story about Ernest Tubb provides a glimpse of the daily experience of touring and shows the symbiotic relationship that developed between touring musicians and roadhouse proprietors. As Joe Marshall recollects,

I'll tell you the story about Ernest Tubb. [He] was here showing one night. And Kenny, my brother, was selling tickets here. Well, this was before we had the restaurant -- just a little room, like, in there.

And Ernest was sitting there and I was sitting there and Butterball [Herbert McBride "Butterball" Paige] was sitting with us... Butterball was his lead guitar, all "Come In Butterball," if you're familiar with his records.

We were all just sitting there, gabbing, you know, waiting for show time. Kenny was there just selling away. They was coming in, lining up. Kenny was throwing down the one dollar bills, says, "Joe, come here, go get us some one dollar bills." Ernest says, "Joe, you need some ones?" And, uh, Kenny says, "Yeah, we need some." Butterball, he handed his keys, "Go out there to the bus and get us some one dollar bills."

He came in, a soapbox -- you can't see me here without a camera -- a big soapbox, what is it, about two or three feet high, two or three feet square. He carried it in his arms, go walk in there and set it down. And Ernest said, "There you are. Get what you want." And that box was full, packed with greenback money [laughing].

So Butterball and me stood there and counted out some ones and Kenny gave us some money to put it back. He said, "Now Butterball, take it and lock it up." [laughs]....

That's, that's, that's when everybody got cash in those days. You had to play schools or anything for a percentage of the house. And they always paid you in money. And Ernest put it in that soapbox....

They had been out on the road several days. That was on their way back into Nashville and they made this stop-off for us that night. That's the way we booked them, you know, because this was really a small auditorium for them to play. But they did still play it, sure.... Any of them would play it. Because we had about seven hundred chairs, you could really get a thousand people in there. Sure they would play it. (Marshall 2000b)

Bobby Green, the rhythm guitarist with the Quonset's band the Rovin' Ramblers, came into contact with many stars when they opened up for the headlining musicians. As he reflects,

So we were on the radio station and Joe would book these, uh, big-name bands in, country bands, and tell everybody we were going to play a show and then they were going to follow us. What we were doing was just opening for them. And, uh, so then we would play about fifteen, twenty minutes and then they came on and really did the show.

There was no back door to the stage and I will never forget Cowboy Copas. He hid behind the piano sometimes and, and then when his, his front man played a

couple of tunes and they brought on Cowboy Copas, he was just like a jack-in-the-box. Came right up from behind the piano. [laughs] But, uh, we did those kind of things. (Green in Green et al. 2001) (Fig. 36, 37 in Appendix C).

So it was the Quonset Auditorium's prime location and connections with radio that brought it into the country tour circuit. It was used by Grand Old Opry members because of its relatively large size, and because it was so conveniently located on their tour route out of Nashville. The Quonset was used by other musicians also because of its central location on the Dixie Highway and connection with Joe Marshall, the local radio man who provided a booking and performance network for touring musicians.

Marshall was involved in the country music business during its transition from a less formal network of advance men and promoters to a huge industry where the stars became so popular that they could no longer interact with the public on a personal level. Ernest Tubb would no longer be able to sit behind the ticket window when the crowd was filing in and Cowboy Copas would not consider hiding behind the piano until it was his turn to come on stage. The Quonset opened when the country music business was switching its focus from radio to recordings and it closed as television exposure began to replace live performances in smaller communities to gain exposure. The Quonset sat at a crossroads, and provided opportunities for both the old music networks and the new.

The Chitlin Circuit in Bowling Green:

"Rhythm and Blues Baby, Rhythm and Blues" (Banks 2002)

Although the Quonset Auditorium hosted gospel, jazz and in its later years, rock and roll, R&B is what most people from the African-American community of Bowling Green remember it for, and it was the chitlin circuit that brought all of these genres to the Auditorium. Generally speaking there were several levels to the chitlin circuit ranging

from small clubs and country juke joints where lesser-known artists worked to sophisticated lounges and theaters such as the Royal Peacock in Atlanta, the Howard Theater in Washington and the Apollo Theater in Harlem (Danchin 1998:41). By the time the Quonset opened in 1947 there were already many small and medium sized venues in Bowling Green that were well established on the chitlin circuit. When it opened, the Quonset became the largest venue, with a seating capacity of 700 people or standing room for 1000, available to the African-American community and because of this it attracted some of the better known African-American recording artists.

The Quonset Auditorium entered the chitlin circuit very soon after it opened. Upton Roundtree, a local black promoter, approached Joe Marshall, the owner of the Quonset, about booking big acts at the Quonset that his local black club could not accommodate. As Marshall recalled, "...it was open for anybody. If you had twenty-five dollars you could rent the Quonset one night and have what you wanted to have." (Marshall in Green et al. 2001) It was not long until the Quonset was known as a hot spot for R&B, as well as country music, the Ramblers' Saturday dances, and other events.

As explained by saxophonist Robert Phillips, top R&B bands first came to Bowling Green because, "Upton [Roundtree] was a guy [promoter] fronting for some white guy, ran all these top bands in. Because they played at Upton's place." Joe Marshall described the way that Upton Roundtree booked musicians at the Quonset. He recalls,

...when you got on a list of these people, you got all of their flyers and their advertising when they was coming this way. That's the way he got them. Because they made more money than what they made at the Quonset normally, but they'd be coming through, see.

Like if they was going, uh, from Louisville to Atlanta, they'd like to play the Quonset on the way. They got a day in between and sure they'd play the Quonset. It paid their expense; they had to pay those boys and the bandleader. If he didn't make a penny, he was ahead because he'd have to pay the boys out of his pocket if they didn't work. So they made some money anyway. But that's the way that worked.

And Roundtree, Upton, was on their list and he got all their material. [He'd say?] "Joe, look here, I, I have Little Richard." "Really?" "Yeah. Here's the dates he's going to be coming through. And, can I get the Quonset?" And we would check out a date and tell, "Yeah," and book it on the calendar and it was his that night and he knew it.

He'd pay me right then, twenty-five dollars and it was his. So then he would get with them and book them and he would do the advertising and everything. I did nothing but just collect the money for those hamburgers and drinks they [the audience] bought that night. (Marshall 2000a)

Roundtree retired in the late 50s and other local promoters such as Walter Bird and Val C. Poole took up his business booking touring stars and promoting local groups on the regional tour circuit. (Banks 2002, Thompson 2001, Edmonds 2001) Although all of these promoters are now deceased, Geraldine Banks and Wilhelmina Whitney, daughters of Walter Bird, have shared their memories of the Quonset Auditorium and the Bowling Green music scene with me and their perceptions have been incorporated into this study.

The Quonset was within walking distance of the heart of Shake Rag, a long standing African American community in Bowling Green, and could draw in two to three hundred walk-in audience members, although it also attracted people from neighboring towns such as Russellville, Auburn, Morgantown etc. (Phillips 2001). This walk-in audience represents approximately five to seven percent of the total black population of

Warren County, in which Bowling Green is located, at that time¹¹. As mentioned earlier, because the surrounding areas were dry, Bowling Green became a center for music and entertainment.

The African-American music scene in Bowling Green's Shake Rag was thriving in the post-WW II era as people congregated in clubs with jukeboxes and live music. Although the post-war era saw a surge in the popularization of black music, Shake Rag had been known as a center for music and entertainment for some time, and one explanation of how Shake Rag got its name is that people would come there to "dance and shake their rags (thus the name Shake Rag)."¹² (Thompson 2002)

Geraldine Banks, the daughter of local promoter Walter Bird, grew up at the center of one of the juke joint strips on Center Street. Banks recalls,

Entertainment was big in Shake Rag. It was big...on any given night, You could come down here and there would be people everywhere. You know. This is where all the blacks just hung out. Not only here in Warren County but all the surrounding counties. This is where you would find everybody....

There was several clubs on Center Street that was kind of like after hour bars. You know, after Third [Street] closed everybody would migrate to Center street. ... For the most part over here if you wanted to bar hop you could walk to club to club to club to club. It was real nice.

¹¹ In 1950, Warren County's total population was 42,758 of which 4,445 people were African-American (BRADD 1974:4, 5, 14).

¹² The name Shake Rag itself may actually signify a link to other black communities in which clubs and juke joints were a focus of entertainment, and signifies a crossroads where memory is both localized and nationally significant. "Shake Rag" is a fairly frequently used place name for black communities that are music and entertainment centers within larger towns in America. Elvis Presley grew up next to the Shake Rag community in Tupelo, Mississippi where he was exposed to live blues music and gospel, which had a powerful effect on him (Guralnick 1994:23; Littlesugar and Cooper 1998). While each "Shake Rag" community has its own folk etymology for its name, one often forgotten, explanation is that the name stems from an association with ragtime music that was popular during the turn of the century when many of the urban African-American communities were growing. Ragtime is the first commercial black music produced for a black audience that introduced the piano into black folk dance and music traditions (Southern 1983:315).

Bowling Green was the party spot, was the party town back then. It was the party spot. And I think by having big time entertainment coming through here it kind of made us a little famous. You know, at one time I think Shake Rag was comparable, probably entertainment wise, to a little Harlem or something like that. It was big! ...we drew people from all the surrounding counties here. (Banks 2002)

Robert Phillips also recalled, “Bowling Green was a heck of a town back in those days.” (2002) Smaller clubs in Shake Rag on the chitlin circuit included the Sportsmen’s Club, Bob’s Grill, the Mustang Inn, The Pink Poodle, the Morocco Club, The Ritz, the Cool Spot (also known as The Caribbean and Val C. Poole’s place), The Shack, the American Legion, the KP Hall, the Elks Club, Joe Long’s Grill as well as numerous other speakeasies¹³ that were clustered in a four square block area. (Banks 2002; Thompson 2001, Whitney 2002). The strip along 3rd Ave where many clubs were clustered, just a two block walk from the Quonset, can be seen in Figures 27 through 29. Some of the bigger venues like the American Legion on Center Street (Fig. 30) booked recording artists when they were on tour, but they also served as regular performance venues for local musicians.

After WW II commercial entertainment catered more to working people and the masses, becoming affordable and accessible to everyone through recordings and affordable shows. Robert Phillips recalls that “the Quonset was more the kind of place anyone could go.” The crowd for the black dances were generally young in their “early twenties and late twenties... who really wanted to have a good time...they could dance...I never seen any, any better dancers since then.” (Phillips 2001)

Chitlin Circuit Stars at the Quonset Auditorium

¹³ Speakeasies are homes or businesses that were opened up for music and entertainment after hours.

The list of black stars who performed at the Quonset includes R&B artists such as Fats Domino, Etta James, Jackie Wilson, T-Bone Walker, Guitar Slim, Ike and Tina Turner, Ray Charles (with Mary Ann Fisher), James Brown, Little Richard, B.B. King, Roy Milton, Ivory Joe Hunter, Lloyd Price, Joe Liggins, Jimmie Liggins, Bobby Blue Bland, Ruth Brown, Chuck Berry, the Drifters, Shirley Ann Lee, Patty Labelle and the Bluebells, and the Shirelles, as well as Gospel greats such as Mahalia Jackson, Clara Ward and the Ward Singers, and the Sister Rosetta Tharpe group. Doubtless there were others who have not been remembered.

The list of musicians above indicates the wide variety of music styles that were heard at the Quonset. Over the Quonset's life span, many of these artists outgrew the Quonset. B.B. King and Fats Domino outgrew it in the mid 1950s, but others who were just breaking into the recording and touring scene continued to play there. Often the chitlin circuit in Bowling Green provided a crossroads where local professional musicians could perform with recording artists. This type of interaction was familiar to the headlining stars because they had all come from similar situations in their own home towns, jamming with the musicians around them. Most of the big R&B artists started out sitting in with musicians who had already made a name for themselves when they performed in the town or city where they lived. Such was the case with B.B. King and Bobby Blue Bland in Memphis and Lloyd Price and Clarence Gatemouth Brown in New Orleans.

Blues music scholar Robert Palmer discusses Ray Charles' success as a recording artist and states,

It helped enormously that every man in Charles' touring band was a formidable player...and that Charles was able to practice songs at his shows before taking the

band in to record them. This was unusual in the fifties, when most artists were under the absolute dominion of their producers or record label owners (Palmer 1991).

Charles and his band tested their material at the Quonset Auditorium, as well as other roadhouses, while they were touring. If the crowd reacted well, Charles knew he should go and record the song. If they did not react he would keep working on it, to find what moved the audience. As he told Palmer,

We played dances in those days, and my band could carry a dance. Basically you're talking about 3 1/2 hours of music, and the band would play instrumentals, good dance music, to get the people to come alive, and bring them in. Get them in, get them socializing, get them happy, and stir them up! You really had to get a groove going, and keep it going (Charles in Palmer 1991).

Mary Ann Fisher, dubbed "the Songbird of the South," is a Kentucky native who grew up in Henderson and Louisville. She joined Ray Charles' band and starred as his lead female vocalist for three and a half years. As Fisher recalls,

Well Ray Charles, he came to Fort Knox when I was singing with the Army band out there. And ah, they kept on asking and on and on worrying him, "Ray Charles, let Mary Ann sing with their band." "Let little sister sing." [laughs] So he says, "Oh Lord, come on little sister." Because we kept on getting on his nerves you know.

When I got to singing, ah, "I Got It Bad And That Ain't Good," because he had a beautiful arrangement on that tune. And, ah, [Charles said,] "Yeah little sister, come on, sing again little sister".... "If you want to go with me, I would like to have you." ... So, ah, I said, "Okay." And he came back and ah, I left here May the ninth 1955. And I sang with Ray Charles uh, three and a half years. And I left Ray Charles uh, 1958...(Fisher 2001)

That evening, Fisher moved from an outsider to an insider in the folk group of commercial musicians. She had already been a part of the chitlin circuit performing in local bands, but she graduated up a notch to the professional, national level when she went on the road with Ray Charles. Fisher describes the format that she and Charles developed for their shows,

I was on the vocal. I uh, right after we took intermission, uh, I would come on and sing about three or four songs you know.
 And ah, we just went everywhere.... You know he was doing mostly dances and doing what he's doing, now. Right now he don't need to do that, he can fix all these casinos and things like that now (Fisher 2001).

Ray Charles was the first R&B musician to feature a lead female vocalist, a trend that was picked up by others like Ike Turner after Tina had joined his band in 1957 (Turner 1986). Fisher's story illustrates how the road brought musicians together, and how this interaction often spawned musical innovations that changed the course of popular music.

There were some similarities between the chitlin circuit and the country tour circuit. Like Joe Marshall with his commercial roots in radio, B.B. King started performing on local radio in Memphis. He used the opportunity to plug his upcoming performances with his band, a fluctuating mix of musicians, just like Joe Marshall was doing in Bowling Green with the Rovin' Ramblers. B.B. King recalls, "I was just about as popular there in Memphis at that time as I guess I am today. But just in that area. Within the radius of say 100 miles of where people could hear me." (Aldin and Lee 1988:14)

B.B. King put out his first recording in 1949, and because of exposure from airplay, he was able to break out of the local tour circuit. The following excerpt from a 1988 *Living Blues* article about B.B. King shows the ad-hoc nature of the tour circuit when King was starting out. He recalls,

I didn't have a group. I was just featured. Like you got a band and the agency books them on with you. I was featured with. You dig. From '52, I believe, to '55 I was featured like that you know. With many people.

The booking agency, shall we say would have many artists that don't have a band or nobody to back them. But they got several groups that don't have no stars with them.

So what they would do, the booking agency will say, "Listen, we've got this gentleman here with an orchestra, and we've got the gentleman over here that's got a hot record. I'll let you have the two." So you're not connected with me and I'm not connected with you. But your job is to play my music through that night. And if we made a pretty good combination they may sell us to somebody else. That's the way it was (King in Aldin and Lee 1988:14).

Local Legends

The situation described above by B.B. King is exactly the situation that some members of Bowling Green's House Rockers¹⁴ found themselves in as their band gained a reputation in the late 1940s. Upton Roundtree started booking the House Rockers as a unit as well as freelancing musicians from the band as he booked engagements at the Quonset and other clubs in the region.

Two of these key players in the local R&B chitlin circuit scene, who have become local legends, were saxophonist Robert Phillips and guitarist William Foster. Phillips and Foster both headlined with the House Rockers and also bounced around the local chitlin circuit playing behind other headliners or recording artists such as James Brown, B.B. King, Guitar Slim, Lloyd Price, and the list goes on. While unknowns at the time like Little Richard went on to be superstars, Phillips and Foster became local legends because of their musicianship and association with famous R&B artists.

By 1949 the House Rockers had begun to bounce around the regional chitlin circuit in the northern Tennessee and Kentucky area. Robert Phillips describes how this developed in the following narrative,

¹⁴ Robert Phillips (Franklin, Kentucky), William Foster and Robert Henley (Bowling Green, Kentucky), the Suggs Brothers (Clarksville, Tennessee), James Hise (Russellville, Kentucky) and Joe Proctor (Rockfield, Kentucky), as well as other local musicians from time to time.

We were drawing some people, we were drawing good crowds. So, then after that he [Upton Roundtree] started having us play behind the...recording artists...

Upton Roundtree was booking and, if you can catch the artist uh, between Nashville and Louisville...they would come cheaper you know...it'd bring just enough.... Made it comfortable for them to play. And we played, we were fill-ins.

He kept us pretty busy then. Sometimes he would book us, well like uh, Bobby Blue Bland and B.B. King, James Brown, uh...Lloyd Price.... We would maybe go from here to Clarksville to Hopkinsville to Madisonville and all around little, little circle with them. Yeah. (Phillips 2001)

The chitlin circuit provided an opportunity for local and national music networks to intersect. Entrepreneurial opportunities were developed by promoters thereby providing an opportunity for local professional musicians to perform with the recording artists.

Promoters like Upton Roundtree exploited a niche that brought exposure to headlining artists, made him, as a promoter, a few bucks, and provided an opportunity for local musicians to sit in with recording stars. The cutthroat, and penny-wise nature of the chitlin circuit allowed local musicians to play a role in the budding careers of superstars. The first time Phillips performed at the Quonset was with Little Richard in 1949. He recalls, "Now, he wasn't even famous because he, he grew up in Clarksville, [Tennessee]¹⁵.... Little Richard Penniman, that's his name." (Phillips 2001). Little Richard performed at the Quonset both before and after breaking into the recording business. The Quonset Auditorium provided a large enough space to handle the popular recording artists when they came through, but a small enough space to attract performers who had not broken into the bigtime scene yet. From the sounds of it, the audiences were

¹⁵ Little Richard is from Macon, Georgia, but by 1947 he had left home and was traveling with Sugarfoot Sam's Minstrel Show. It was after this that he spent some time in Clarksville, TN (www.history-rock-roll.com/richard.htm). Little Richard did not record until 1951 with RCA Victor after winning a talent contest and did not become really popular until 1955 when he recorded "Tutti Frutti" with Specialty Records, having been given a plug by Lloyd Price (Clark 1995),

appreciative either way. Joe Marshall (2000a) recalls, “Little Richard, he was there several times, he was real young. Oh, I remember him bouncing’ all over that piano. He was good. Still is!”

At the end of 1949, Phillips went out on a tour round with James Brown and Big Maybelle to Nashville, and a circuit through towns in central and western Kentucky arranged by Upton Roundtree. Phillips recalls,

I went on one of the tours with James Brown when he first started...he was just a singer and just had the four, three guys backing him up. They were going in a station wagon. And we went on tour with...Big Maybelle. She was a big fat...blues singer (Phillips 2001).

Roundtree had a big name coming just about every week either to the Quonset Auditorium or to one of the smaller venues in Shake Rag such as the American Legion. As Phillips recalls, the recording artists, “were all on their way up. So they would come maybe sometimes twice a month..., it’s not like now that they have big stars that you see them once a year, or whatever (Phillips 2001).

Roundtree had developed a system with the managers of recording artists so that his local musicians would be prepared, and know their material, when the big names came to town. As Phillips recalls,

[with the] big artist, you know...they would...send the songs they wanted us to learn and...couple weeks here and we'd learn them.... Well, the people that we know... never had any complaints. Because we, had some pretty good musicians...it didn't take us long to catch on (Phillips).

Phillips played behind quite a few other recording artists such as Ike and Tina Turner, Jimmy and Joe Liggins, Ray Charles, Big and Little Joe Turner, Guitar Slim, and Bill Doggett.

Phillips was on the cutting edge of R&B during the post-WW II years and was exposed to many different musical styles, which he had to pick up quickly. Phillips recalls what it was like to perform with different artists,

It was easier to play with Big Maybelle. She was playing...just some good blues. Up tempo and slow.... But playing with James Brown...they say he's the hardest man in show business [to work with], they're not kidding!

Because he sang one song, an hour and half sometimes. And you'd just be wore out.... You were really tired when you got through playing with him. [laughs]

I thought he had a, had a, smart mouth. He'd give you a lecture, "You're not going to get my money" and all. He told me he didn't care what they did before and after but while they was onstage, said they was going to, "be like little baby brothers." [laughs]

Legendary status, even if it is local, does not come without a price. Performing with people you have never met before can be a challenge, especially if they have a superior attitude, Phillips tells about some of his experiences with the stars.

Well now, the attitudes.... Now it always turned out the ones that wasn't as talented as we were were the hardest to get along with, "This wasn't right," "that wasn't right," "Do this," "Hey, you didn't hit that right."... It wasn't missed, he was late getting there himself...then he'd jump out of key....

That kind of got to me and always has, because those kind of people are always getting the chance to be something because somebody picks them up. They're at the right place at the right time or whatever. Then people that are really talented, guys out on the street that can really play, never get a shot.

That's always been a sore spot with me... There were quite a few of them. They were, they were a star and they let you know *they* were the star and *you* do what *I* say even if it's it wrong, you know. Yeah, I hated that part (Phillips 2001).

Although Phillips had little identity with many of the stars beyond "Hey Sax" he is grateful for the opportunities to learn from some of his idols. He reflects that his biggest influence with the saxophone was Fathead Newman, with Ray Charles's band.

He copied Fathead's style from the records so that he could fill in for him on occasion, and as an audience member he heard him play when he came to the Quonset Auditorium.

Because of the network of fill-in musicians that Upton Roundtree had developed for R&B recording artists, if a band got hung up because of car problems or some other intervention, headlining artists could still make the date without their band. The following story by Robert Phillips illustrates this;

One time we got rehearsal, we got to rehearse with Ray Charles all afternoon. His bus broke down and he was already there and well, he didn't know if they [his band] was going to make it or not. So Upton called, told me Ray Charles was up here and needs some [help]. So, we'd already been playing' all Ray Charles' stuff and I'd been playing those saxophone solos, you know. So we got together there.

He was very pleased. He said, "Oh, we going to be al-, we going to be alright, here."... So, uh, we practiced I guess about a couple hours or more and then they [his band] got there. They got there about eight, seven-thirty or eight. Dance wasn't going to start until nine so we didn't have to play.

Today Phillips is still performing with recording artists such as Mary Ann Fisher, "Songbird of the South," whom he first met in the early 1950s at the Quonset Auditorium when she was touring with Ray Charles. Although Phillips has never recorded himself, and recalls, "I would have been going along, you know, with somebody, but I had just got married and, uh, that's the only thing got, saved me from being all over the place." (Phillips in Green et al. 2001) Phillips has never left the local circuit and is known as a local R&B legend. A whole generation grew up listening to him play at local dances with the House Rockers, as well as along side famous recording artists. For this generation, now in their late 50s or older, he represents a connection to their youth and to memories of a time in commercial music when famous musicians still played at local joints, and at affordable prices.

William "Guitar" Foster is also a local music legend who was a member of the House Rockers. For the young Bowling Green generation of the 1950s he represents a local connection to popular music because of his association with famous musicians and touring. Foster first entered the chitlin circuit as a teenager, sneaking in to local clubs. He fairly quickly moved into the circuit as a musician and bridged the gap between the amateur (local) and professional (national) networks as he was picked up as a guitarist by recording artists on tour. He recalls,

I got in a band. And, and I start playing, a, little areas around here. And then I start going to the Quonset down there. And ah, I guess that was, uh, probably 1950... And all I'd watch would be the guitar player. Wouldn't watch nobody else but him.

So I'd be watching the different styles they play and I thought it was amazing what they was doing in there. I said, "Now one of these days I'm going be up on that stage doing that, one of these days." So um, I kept practicing, I kept practicing.

So the guy that booked the jobs there at one time had Joe Liggins, Joe Liggins came in there [to the Quonset]. The Honeydrippers the Honeydrippers was a big professional band.

And, and, um, he came in and um, and this guy introduced me to him said uh, "I got a young fellow here," said, "He's a, he's a good little guitar player." said, "Listen at him." I think I was about I guess sixteen at that time. And he heard me and he said, "You know," said, "I like you." You know?

So, so after said, "You want to play with me?" I said, "Well I got to check with my mom." So I went over to mom's, so we got uh, paperwork done. You know? Where I can play in the clubs, you know. Le-legal matters had to straighten out you know. And I left then...about '53 I left.

But first professional job...well like I say, Quonset played here and then when I left here with Jimmy [means Joe] Liggins, I went on the road playing professional. All over the United States.

And I, and I, and I came back in here playing with his brother Jimmy Liggins about a year or so later. And I guess the biggest event I had here [at the Quonset Auditorium]. I came here playing with, like I say, uh, band of Guitar Slim. He

was, he was out of New Orleans, and ehh. He was real famous back in the fifties. Real famous. (Foster 2001).

Like Mary Ann Fisher who made it onto the national tour circuit, Foster got his break auditioning with bands as they toured the chitlin circuit through the region. Upton Roundtree saw that Foster had talent and made an effort to give him a break with recording artists as he arranged dates for clubs in the Bowling Green area. As Foster recalls,

I tell you I played with another guy named uh, Lloyd Price too. Upton and I went to, to uh, Hopkinsville to see him because he wanted to hire him to play here [in Bowling Green]. And um, he was talking to him and he said, "I got a young fellow here that wants to set and sing with your band." And the guy said, he said, "Yeah that's fine...I got a guitar here but...something happened to the guy that was playing it. I know he got locked up in Nashville or something."

I come in and tuned it up you know, see. And I knew every one of Lloyd Price's songs.... So after awhile...he come out there and laid out with "Lawdy, Miss Claudy." And I was right on that thing with him, you know. His eyes got that big. You know, I mean, he's just grinning. But, I knew every one of his.... Because I studied them records. I studied them. (Foster 2001)

The Quonset Auditorium was not only booked for R&B stars, it also became a venue where local African-American bands performed on their own, thus serving both the local and national commercial music scene.

The Marshall brothers were able to book a number of events in the Quonset Auditorium in one evening and were glad to do this so they could make more money. Often the Saturday night dance for the white crowd would start around 7:30 pm. When that was over they would clean up and open the place up again for a black dance that started after midnight. William Foster describes it this way,

Now the Quonset,...it didn't have no closing time because you didn't sell no booze okay? You know, all they sold was pops.

So that way a lot of things started after four o'clock at night. Especially Black dances on a holiday, like...night before Memorial Day, was going into Memorial Day you started at twelve o'clock at night. Twelve to four. That was the popular thing. *God*, it was popular. (Foster 2001)

Foster moved up along the chitlin circuit pretty quickly. He went from touring locally to touring nationally with recording artists. Eventually he headlined as the feature musician himself, billed as "Guitar Foster," at the Royal Peacock club in Atlanta. He recalls,

I had a good life in entertainment...It's been rough starting off.... I remember the first time uh, that I made any big money...[was] in Atlanta.... I was working at a place they called the Royal Peacock night club. It was the finest, uh, black place in town. And I was, the, chief star there....

I was billed as *Guitar Foster*.... And back then...the guys, the stars from out of state were dressed to kill.... Slide on into stage playing the guitar. And all the young girls be trying to grab us. And we'd scoot back. Best feeling in the world. You slide out and [laughs and coughs] ten or fifteen ladies trying to grab you. [laughs] I done that for, uh, quite a few years.

Foster met and performed with many famous R&B musicians both while touring with other bands, and while he was featured at Atlanta's Royal Peacock club. Some of these famous musicians include Joe Liggins, Jimmie Liggins, Jackie Preston, Joe Tex, Bobby Bland, B.B. King, Lowell Fulson, Jimmy Witherspoon, Roy Brown, Hank Ballard and the Midnighters. As Foster describes,

I would meet guys on the road some.... A lot of times in Atlanta. Because all of them's come to Atlanta. Everybody come to Atlanta, came to the Royal Peacock Club, that was it. When you was there, that was it. That was the place to be!

They have two or three shows a night and...they have a matinee in afternoon on Sunday. People be lined up here to corner there. I mean lined up like that. You know. (Foster 2001)

While in Atlanta, recording star Fay Adams introduced Foster to Al Silvers, of Herald Records, and got him an audition. Silvers arranged a recording session for Foster in New York city, but as fate would have it, just as he was about to jump on the plane, he got a

letter saying that he was drafted. Instead of recording, Foster served in the military and played as part of the USO tour to entertain troops.

Although Foster's headlining recording career never got off the ground, he did work as a session musician on a few albums. As he recalls,

I worked on several albums with other people. I worked with Hank Ballard and the Midnighters for a while... Group, group out of Los Angeles, Lamplighters.

And of course Robert [Phillips] and I we, uh, we, uh, worked on some things and down in Nashville. They didn't do anything on it. And, and, also uh, a group out of Clarksville I worked with. That didn't do anything. (Foster 2001)

The experience of the chitlin circuit was different for fill-in musicians and the recording stars even though they were part of the same folk group. For example, the recording stars toured so extensively in the post-WW II years that many roadhouses and musicians have blurred together in their minds. For the fill-ins who stayed in the area, details are much clearer. When B.B. King performed at the Corvette Museum in Bowling Green in 1995 Phillips attended the concert. He recalls, "I got to holler at him [B.B. King], and...well I knew he wouldn't remember me...but he remembered coming to Bowling Green, sure enough. Yeah. Yeah." (Phillips 2001)

Black gospel singers also tapped into the chitlin circuit and booked performances at the Quonset Auditorium. The Quonset was the largest venue available for blacks in Bowling Green, and it was not a bar/club, so it served the needs of popular gospel musicians well. John Edmonds, a gospel musician from Bowling Green, remembers hearing stories about the gospel shows at the Quonset Auditorium. He recalls,

The Quonset was also...home for a lot of gospel shows. The world's greatest gospel singer, Mahalia Jackson came to Bowling Green to do a concert there; Clara Ward Singers; Rosetta Tharpe.

They would all come through Bowling Green and, uh, would grace the Quonset with their presence and their concerts (Edmonds in Green et al. 2001).

Because of the entrepreneurial efforts of both Upton Roundtree and Joe and Kenny Marshall, the Quonset Auditorium became a roadhouse on the chitlin circuit, as well as the country music circuit. Roundtree could not entice stars to the Quonset Auditorium through the provision of free radio advertisements like Marshall did, but his work as a local promoter, who could provide musicians to fill-in and save some travel and expense money, helped him attract recording stars trying to break even on the tour scene.

The Quonset opened during a transition in popular music when the recording industry was booming and a greater volume of recording artists were hitting the road to get exposure and make a living. By the time the Quonset Auditorium closed its doors in 1959 many of the big recording artists had outgrown venues like it and were beginning to perform only in major cities at large theaters and civic centers. This shift in touring was partly spurred on by the use of television performances to reach smaller communities.¹⁶ As these changes occurred, communities such as Bowling Green began to lose their intimate connection with the touring stars. A folk group developed on the tour circuits between promoters, venue owners, fill-in musicians, opening bands and others. This chapter has used personal experience narratives to illustrate the connection between the local and national music networks facilitated by the Quonset Auditorium.

In comparing the country and R&B tour networks, this chapter has shown how similar they were, yet at the same time how separate. They shared promotional

¹⁶ Professional Wrestling at the Quonset Auditorium was subject to the same changes as commercial music was. The emphasis moved from touring along a circuit to more limited performances in large cities and on television.

techniques used by the record industry, radio, and exposure through juke boxes and personal appearances, but these were applied to their unique markets divided along racial lines. The experience of touring for white musicians was very different from that of black musicians in the post-WW II era because of the lack of access to basic facilities such as restrooms, food and accommodations. The following chapter will detail some of the hardships encountered by black musicians while they were on tour.



Figure 27 Now abandoned entertainment strip in the Shake Rag neighborhood. This is a row of clubs, restaurants and speakeasies. Nancy's Tea Room, that operated as a restaurant and entertainment hall, is in the foreground. South side of Third Ave, looking east towards State Street. Photo by author.



Figure 28 Now abandoned entertainment strip in the Shake Rag neighborhood. South side of Third Ave, looking east towards State Street. Photo by author.

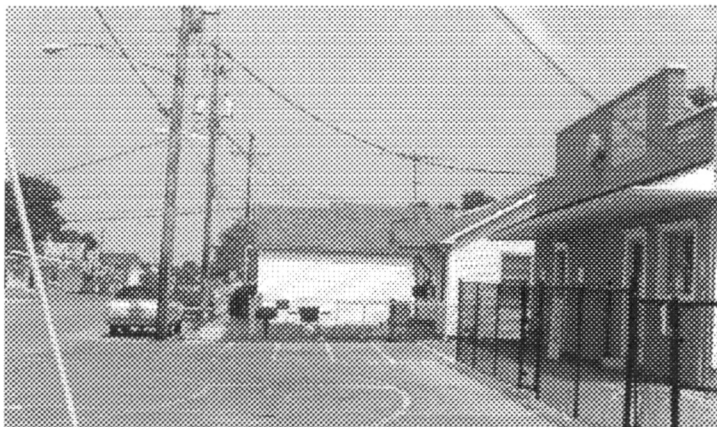


Figure 29. Redeveloped entertainment strip in Shake Rag. The building that housed the Pink Poodle club is in the foreground (R) and is now home to a headstart program, and the famous Mustang Inn is the shotgun structure in the center of the frame, now a private residence. North side of Third Ave, looking west. Photo by author.



Figure 30. The old American Legion building, one of the most popular clubs in Shake Rag and Bowling Green's Chitlin Circuit. The Ike and Tina Turner Revue and James Brown performed here. Second and Center Streets. Photo by author.

Chapter 4. Cultural Crossroads: Music breaking down barriers

"If our people couldn't sit there...and hear him play, he didn't play"
(Mary Ann Fisher speaking of Ray Charles 2001)

The Quonset Auditorium is significant as the first roadhouse in Bowling Green that served both the African-American and European-American music networks discussed in the previous chapter¹. It fits into the story of the civil rights movement on both local and national levels: as one of the first entertainment venues, other than the movies², that regularly brought both black and white people together in Bowling Green; and as a venue where popular and influential musicians in the civil rights movement performed.

This chapter will place the Quonset Auditorium within the historical and social context of the post-WW II era when racism in the south was beginning to be challenged, in part through the popularization of black music.

Marion B. Lucas's *A History of Blacks in Kentucky Volume 1* (1992), George Wright's, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky Volume 2* (1992) and the Kentucky Oral History Commission's (2002) documentary film and educational materials entitled *Living the Story: The Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky*, provide a history and chronology of race relations and the civil rights movement in Kentucky. Although this chapter will briefly touch on the details of the civil rights movement, the reader is referred to the works cited above for more detailed and comprehensive information about the civil rights movement.

¹ The Quonset Auditorium was the first large venue that provided a club atmosphere, and was the only privately owned entertainment venue at the time open to both races. The Bowling Green National Guard Armory was booked by "big time" R&B artists and professional wrestlers who drew large mixed white and black audience to the segregated hall (Phillips 2002b).

² In Bowling Green the Diamond Theater had balcony seating for African-Americans, but the Capitol Arts Theatre was white only.

Other sources drawn on in this section include Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison's *Music and Social Movements* (1998), Jon Michael Spencer's *Protest and Praise* (1990) and numerous articles from *Living Blues* magazine featuring interviews with some of the famous musicians who performed at the Quonset Auditorium such as Lloyd Price (Dahl 1999), Fats Domino (Joyce 1977), B.B. King (Aldin and Lee 1988), Bobby Bland (O'Neal 1971, Guralnick 1978) and others. These musicians describe race relations in the post-WW II era and their experiences with the civil rights movement. Tad Jones's article in *Living Blues* (1987): "Separate But Equal: The Laws of Segregation and Their Effect on New Orleans Black Musicians, 1950-1964" has been very informative, and the situation he describes for New Orleans has many parallels to that of the Quonset Auditorium and Bowling Green. The personal experiences of musicians and audience members at the Quonset Auditorium will be used to chronicle some of these changes and indicate how local experiences fit into a national trend.

Historical Context - Segregation in the South and Bowling Green, Kentucky

The twenty to thirty year period after the Civil War has been called the period of Reconstruction. During this time, blacks were awarded equal legal status to whites. In 1896, these rights began to be stripped in most southern states, including Kentucky, following the supreme court ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* that set the legal precedent for segregation. This ruling interpreted equal rights to mean "separate but equal." In the years just before and after 1896, "Jim Crow"³ laws were passed that limited racial

³ - The term "Jim Crow" is said to be derived from one of the first minstrel show dance routines called "Jump Jim Crow" developed by white performer Thomas Dartmouth in 1832 and modeled after a black slave he had seen in Louisville, KY, singing and dancing a similar routine on the street (Afro-American Almanac 2002).

- Through time, "Jim Crow" has come to signify a particular separate/segregated bathroom, entryway etc. for African-Americans only. The Jim Crow system refers to segregation laws, codes and practices that

interaction by keeping the two groups apart at public facilities (Kentucky Oral History Commission 2002:timeline, Wright 1992). This legislation led to the development of separate schools, restaurants, businesses, and of particular interest to this study, entertainment venues, as well as the exclusion of blacks from the use of white services, including public restrooms.

The “Jim Crow” laws, as Tad Jones (1987:24) states, “affirmed and made secure the institution of white supremacy in the South.” The laws invalidated amendments made during the reconstruction that had been safeguards for black Americans. As Jones (1987:24) writes, “the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ stood as a cornerstone of the South’s system of racial segregation until May 17, 1954, and the court’s landmark decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*.”

During the Quonset Auditorium’s twelve years of operation (1947-1959), these are some of the major landmarks in the Kentucky civil rights movement:

- 1948 Lyman T. Johnson files suit against University of Kentucky for admission
- 1948 Louisville hospitals begin desegregating
- 1950 Day law is amended to allow individual colleges the choice of admitting African Americans
- 1954 Andrew Wade, a black man, buys a house in a white Louisville neighborhood to push the issue of integration. The Wade family is harassed by white people and the house is bombed.
- 1955 State colleges opened to all applicants.
- 1955 Suit by NAACP results in federal court ban against segregation in housing in Louisville.
- 1956 White resistance in Louisville towards co-education leads to Governor Chandler sending in the state police and the National Guard to prevent violence.
- 1957 Kentucky High School Athletic Association allows African Americans to become members and to participate in state tournaments.
- 1959 NAACP Youth Council pickets Louisville’s Brown Theater when its management refuses to admit African Americans to see *Porgy and Bess*.

divided public facilities along racial lines and is a euphemism for a racial caste system designed to preserve white supremacy (Lucas 2002).

(Kentucky Oral History Commission 2002:/timeline)

Although the 1954 *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision signaled the start of the national civil rights movement through the abolishment of segregated schools, music had already started to integrate the South before this in a less confrontational way. Nashville's WLAC, a high powered radio station starting in the mid 1940s was important in this region, and as far as the Midwest, for bringing black music to a vast radio audience, both white and black. A book that examines the impact of radio and radio DJs on the popularity of black music is Wes Smith's (1989), *The Pied Pipers of Rock 'N' Roll: Radio Deejaays of the 50s And 60s*, which devotes a whole chapter to Nashville's WLAC and it's influential deejays such as "John R" Richbourg and the "Hossman", Bill Hoss Allen. WLAC and the payola pattern drew R&B artists to Nashville to market their wares, which helped strengthen tour routes along the Dixie Highway and, serendipitously, brought popular artists to venues like the Quonset Auditorium along the route of the Dixie (Smith 1989).

Wade Daniel in his book, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s*, points out that during the post-WW II years in many Southern cities, musicians and athletes did more to undermine segregation than community leaders. Music had become an identifying symbol for the "youth culture" that sprang up during and after WW II, and the new pastiche of musical traditions heard in R&B, and later rock and roll, appealed to many white youths who were rebelling from their own roots (Daniel 2000:148). By extension we can see that it took the opening of tour circuits and roadhouses, like the Quonset Auditorium, to both blacks and whites to actualize the change in segregation. Daniel uses professional wrestling in Memphis to illustrate his point, describing how pro-

wrestler Sputnik Monroe drew large African-American audiences to his matches held in segregated auditoriums. The Memphis auditoriums eventually became integrated as the percentage of blacks at these events outweighed whites (Daniel 2000:126). A similar situation is remembered at the Quonset Auditorium as racial barriers and segregation began to break down at the venue as a growing number of whites attended the concerts of popular artists such as Fats Domino, Ray Charles, and Ike and Tina Turner. Social interaction between the races was facilitated primarily through popular music, but also by the club atmosphere at the Quonset and the availability and use of alcohol⁴ there. The Armory, the only other venue open to both races during this time, was strictly segregated and provided more of a concert setting than a nightclub atmosphere. The Quonset was booked more often than the Armory (once it had been rebuilt in 1949) for “big time” black acts because it was more accessible to the African-American community and because the Promoter, Upton Roundtree, could operate his bootlegging business at the Quonset and thereby make more profit from events, due to the Auditorium’s owners turning a blind eye to this venture.

Although Bowling Green did not have major sit-ins and protests during the civil rights movement like the area cities of Louisville, Nashville and Memphis, racial tension was a reality, and segregation was not officially abolished until far after it was legislated. In 1919, a Bowling Green chapter of the NAACP was organized to address the issue of blacks being arrested for crimes that they had not committed (NAACP 1919). Blacks did not have equal access to education and jobs in Bowling Green, and between 1928 and 1948 the National Urban League observed that 85 percent of the gainfully employed blacks worked as servants in the homes of whites or as common laborers in tobacco

⁴ The Quonset was not licensed, but bringing your own booze was not discouraged.

factories, stone quarries, and lumber mills and were excluded from labor unions. The remaining 15 percent of blacks operated businesses of their own, usually to service the black community (Wright 1992:16).

Despite this situation, my informants recall little public activism, and the push for integration appears to have taken effect more subtly through the influence of popular music and pop culture. Integration was slow in its application to Bowling Green; it was not until 1964, ten years after the precedent had been set in the famous *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* ruling, that Bowling Green schools began to integrate. Maxine Ray, a teenager during this period, does not recall any racial incidents with the transition to integrated schools, but suggests that the reason for this smooth transition was due, in part, to demographics. Most black people were integrated into working class white schools where there was already more acceptance of racial interaction (Ray 2002). Today, blacks and whites in Bowling Green still live in relatively segregated communities with different neighborhoods, churches etc.

Most of the people that I have spoken with do not remember any racial tension at the Quonset Auditorium with the exception of one incident at a wrestling match (J.C. Hubbard 2001). This apparent lack of tension may be that for the most part African-American and European-American peoples led fairly separate lives with separate neighborhoods, schools, churches, and services and no one was really pushing the issue of integration. This situation was unlike those in the cities where there was competition for space and services as both whites and blacks migrated north to find work. Another explanation for this apparent lack of tension may relate to selective memory, often a factor when discussing sensitive issues, as well as the dynamics of the interview process.

My role as a white documentarian may have made the discussion of race relations uncomfortable for African-American informants.

Saxophonist Robert Phillips recalls that when he played music at the Quonset Auditorium there was no racial tension between him and the other white musicians with whom he shared the stage. In this way we can see how music helped to bridge cultural boundaries and gave black musicians a taste of equality (Phillips 2002b). This situation is similar to that described by Tad Jones in New Orleans. Cossimo Matassa's recording studio in the French Quarter became a place in the post-WW II years where there was some equity between blacks and whites. Jones writes,

In many respects the studio was a place where black musicians, could for a time, escape the codes and customs of white supremacy. Here musicians from both races often interacted on an equal professional and social footing, one which they could not enjoy outside the studio arena (Jones 1987:24).

Outside their own communities, groups of black musicians on tour traveling southern highways often did encounter racism. Guitarist William Foster recalls, "...we'd had to play a lot of times and drive for fifty, sixty miles before we could find a place to stay at night. A place to, where I could eat decent." (Foster 2001) Jones describes the same situation encountered by black musicians touring out of New Orleans. He writes, "In most towns, 'soulville' was their destination." (1987:26) Bowling Green's "soulville" was Shake Rag. Because Bowling Green was situated on a major R&B recording artist's performance circuit, musicians touring the Dixie Highway came to rely on the comfortable accommodation and restaurants available to African-Americans in Shake Rag. These amenities helped draw bookings for Bowling Green clubs on the chitlin circuit including the Quonset Auditorium.

William Foster recalled that the Southern Queen Hotel, located just a block from the Quonset Auditorium,

was a big hotel down on Second Avenue and State. And I guess it was from Louisville to Nashville, there wasn't anything compared to it. For minority, wasn't nothing compared to it. I don't care how much money you had. You couldn't stay at the Helm Hotel [in downtown Bowling Green], I don't care what money you had. (Foster 2001)

Although there were other boarding houses and guest houses in Shake Rag, Geraldine Banks recalls,

...this [the Southern Queen] for the most part was where most of the big entertainers came because it was kind of like ritzy.... A lot of them played [ball] right here in the playground [the original center of Shake Rag known as Lee Square].... I remember James Brown playing basketball...[and] Joe Tex. (Banks 2002)

Donny Thompson grew up across the street from the Southern Queen Hotel and remembers playing basketball and baseball with Lloyd Price and his band, as well as James Brown at the playground (Thompson 2001). Shake Rag provided a welcoming community atmosphere that was apparently appreciated by the touring musicians. Other musicians who remembered staying at the Southern Queen include Fats Domino, Ray Charles, Patty Labelle and the Bluebells, Little Richard, Etta James, the Drifters, Shirley Ann Lee and the Shirelles (Thompson 2001).

Although whites were often eager to embrace black music, and segregation in clubs and auditoriums often became loose, Foster describes life on the road to be more of a challenge for black musicians during this time of change,

It was a long time before the local ones [hotels] came in. A long time.... People had houses for entertainers like to stay in. And give them places....

I remember the first hotel I ever stayed at that was a mixed hotel. I believe it was the Holiday Inn. And it was in the sixties.... When the Civil Rights Bill was

signed, they were probably first one out there to break the ground. They broke the top. [laughs] Because later on it starts blending in see. (Foster 2001)

Away from the buffer zone around Bowling Green's "soulville," Robert Phillips, at the 2001 Kentucky Folklife Festival, recalled how he was harassed by police when waiting in the bus station to catch the bus home,

We had a little band called the House Rockers and we were playing for him [Upton Roundtree at his club on Center Street] two or three nights a week. I didn't even have a car; I had to catch the bus.

Uh, that was back, uh, back in, uh, segregated times, you know.... So, I got hit on the bottom of the feet there about twenty times by the police. Had me in the bus station asleep with my feet up on the-- So they want to get you for loitering, you know.

And uh, the first one got all the heaven knocked out of him [laughing]. Because I was asleep and he hit at my feet and I, I -- it's just lucky another guy was with him. Well, lucky for me, I guess, because he was going to, he was going to tear my head up. But anyway, uh.

After they knew what I was doing, they never did bother me no more. I'd, I'd go to sleep. I had to catch the two o'clock bus back to Franklin. I lived in Franklin [south of Bowling Green on the Dixie Highway]. And that was, that was rough. I woke up in Nashville three times [laughs, crowd laughs too]. (Phillips in Green et al. 2001)

Because the National Guard Armory had burnt down the year before the Quonset was built, the Quonset filled a niche that was expanding as R&B and black gospel hit the pop charts in the post-WW II years. Marshall recollects,

Upton Roundtree [the local African-American promoter] booked smaller bands at his club on Center Street...when it come to Ray Charles and, and some, T-Bone Walker, Little Richard, he came and booked our place [the Quonset Auditorium] and brought them over here because it wouldn't hold them over there...(Marshall 2000b).

He'd go anywhere he could and he'd bring these bands in. I only rented him the auditorium if he brought them in. He was a nice guy to work with. And he knew he didn't have anywhere to go.... And he'd pack the thing...(Marshall 2000a)

Marshall goes on to describe the physical layout of the segregated Quonset

Auditorium and his use of its space,

When we rented it to the black people, we had a side entrance for them. And the door was closed at the restaurant. They didn't come in our restaurant, in our office, the front part at all. They used the side door. And from there it was all theirs, from there back. (Marshall 2000a)

Marshall also recalls the appeal of popular black music with white people, and white attendance of black events at the Quonset Auditorium,

Now you saw the little balcony upstairs...a lot of white people would come and buy a ticket and go up there and lean over the rail to watch them dance. That was a good show! [laughing] I spent a lot of time up there, too, with them.... [in low voice] The music was good, of course (Marshall 2000b).

Another perspective on segregation at the Quonset Auditorium is provided by Jim Kinnarney. He describes the Quonset as “just about the reverse of things in those days” with whites crammed up in the balcony and blacks down on the main floor, the opposite situation than segregation in movie theaters where the whites had the prime seats and the blacks got the less desirable balcony seating (Kinnarney 2002). Whites were willing to take this secondary position because they were interested in black music and experiencing black culture.

The Quonset sat at a crossroads for race relations; we can see that over the Quonset's twelve year span of operation, segregation was loosened as black music became more popular with white audiences and as the early efforts of the civil rights movement opened the door for racial tolerance. Odis Blanton, a Bowling Green musician and DJ at Bowling Green's WLBJ in the '50s through to the '70s, offers another account of the segregated situation at the Quonset Auditorium,

I guess the biggest thing with the Quonset Auditorium was... when they used to book in some big acts...known around the country like Fats Domino, Ray

Charles, and just about everybody....There'd be a big dance...mostly for black people.

But they did have a balcony in the back where you could go up the back, back way. It probably would stand about thirty or forty people and I used to go up there a lot and watch it and listen.

And occasionally you could go down on the floor and maybe meet the band or somebody like that. I got to meet Ray Charles down there because he was one of my idols (Blanton 2001).

There are many accounts of fights and violence at the Quonset Auditorium, but these were reportedly more often over a girl than about race. The black performers predominantly drew black crowds, so white people who did come out for these shows were either intrigued by or accepting of black culture. Either way, they represented a minority at the Quonset Auditorium and knew to watch their step.

Robert Phillips, a saxophonist who performed at the Quonset Auditorium with his own band, the House Rockers, and often backed the recording artists at the Quonset Auditorium, recalls that as black music became more popular through radio and recordings, segregation at the Quonset Auditorium became less rigid. Phillips recollects,

...several times there was blacks on one side and whites on the other downstairs [at the Quonset Auditorium].... Well they finally outgrew that so they started coming down. You know, as it got more familiar, I guess with, different people out there.

And they asked me, ...”Was there ever any kind of incidents?” and I, I never saw one. They might have had some but I, I never saw any (Phillips 2001).

Not only was the Quonset Auditorium one of the first segregated, as opposed to racially separate, music venues in Bowling Green, to my knowledge, the Quonset's Dance band was also the first longstanding integrated band composed of both black and

white musicians performing in Bowling Green between 1951 and 1959⁵ (Green 2002; Phillips 2002a, b). Joe Marshall and the Rovin' Ramblers had started out playing strictly country music at the Quonset Auditorium, but as popular music of the day, western swing and R&B, began to be favored over country the Ramblers adapted to their audience's preference and switched to a swing band style to accommodate their regular Saturday dance crowd (Figures 31, 32).

The Ramblers learned their new music style from records as well as from members of the African-American bands that regularly performed for black dances at the Quonset Auditorium. These bands included The Bob Henley Band, primarily composed of older seasoned musicians, and the House Rockers, a group of younger black musicians. Musicians in these African-American bands include Robert Henley, James Hise, Sonny (no one remembers his last name), Robert Phillips, William Foster, Roy Townsend and Joe Proctor (Phillips 2002a, b; Green 2002). The "Quonset's New Band" incorporated horns (saxophones, trumpet), drums, and piano and remained integrated until the late days of the Quonset (Figures 52, 53 in Appendix C).

Bobby Green, a member of the Rovin' Ramblers since 1949, tells how the Quonset's integrated band came to be,

And, you know, we could hit those same licks.... They [the black musicians] taught us. We actually had an integrated band at the Quonset Auditorium for quite a little while. (Green in Green et al. 2001)

We had to have horn players, and drummers. And that [playing with black musicians] did not seem to be any problem to us [laughs]. We were glad to get

⁵ In south-central Kentucky blacks and whites had more personal interaction than in areas where plantation work was dominant because blacks and whites had often worked side by side during slavery. This closer interaction carried over into music on some levels and can be seen in the influence of black music traditions in Bluegrass and Muhlenberg County Thumpicking (Brady 2002). William Foster recalls learning guitar from a white man in Bowling Green, and was called "Cowboy Copas" when he first started playing because of his country repertoire (Foster 2001).

anybody we could. The horn, the saxophone player was pretty good. Sonny.... , And, uh, then there was a drummer that played with us. These were both older guys that had played a lot of that music. Old standard dance kind of tunes of the WW II era in the late '30s. This was in the '50s. These guys were 65 or so years old. And they were good musicians....

Some of these songs [that the black musicians taught us] are still played by dance bands. In those days they were pop tunes....

We played stuff like Glenn Miller stuff. "In The Mood," "String Of Pearls," um, we played um, "It Had To Be You," "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," "Deep Purple," uh, ohh, Hoagie Carmichael things, "Stardust," uh, those kinds of songs.... And we actually played halfway decent music. (Green 2002)

Green had forgotten most of the names of the African-American musicians he had played with at the Quonset until I mentioned a black drummer named Robert Henley, who Donny Thomson (2001) had told me about. Robert Henley had been the drummer with the integrated band (Green 2002). Henley deserves a note here because he provided a bridge between the black and white musical circles in Bowling Green. Growing up in Shake Rag, Robert Henley left Bowling Green as a youngster and traveled as a drummer in circus shows, including Marshall's Minstrels and the Barnum and Bailey outfit. After Henley became blind in the early 1950s, he returned home to Bowling Green but and continued to make a living as a professional musician. He provided a link between the local and national music networks and shared the musical influences that he had picked up while touring with the minstrels with both black and white musicians. Although he was part of the Quonset's new dance band for many years, by the late 1950s he had started a rock and roll band which he fronted with his name, "The Bob Henley Band" (Thompson 2001). Henley was on the cutting edge of commercial music even at this late stage in his career. Having never recorded, Henley is an example of an artists who is

easily forgotten with time even though he had a notable effect upon a local commercial music scene.

The Popularization of Black Music and the Civil Rights Movement

Black gospel as well as popular black music provided emotional fuel for the civil rights movement (Eyerman and Jamison 1998:77), and roadhouses such as the Quonset Auditorium were important arenas where music and politics reached the people. Gospel diva Mahalia Jackson who became a figurehead of the civil rights movement used the resources of commercial music (recording and touring on the chitlin circuit) to gain exposure. Her recording of songs like “Move On Up A Little Higher” became symbols of justice during the racial unrest of the post-WW II era, and she worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to use her music, rooted in black tradition, to draw attention to and support for the civil rights movement. One of her more famous performances was done at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have A Dream” speech in Washington, D.C. in 1963 (Eyerman and Jamison 1998:77).

Because the Quonset was an auditorium, and not a bar/club, it was an appropriate venue for gospel groups to perform at while touring through the upper South. Even though the black audience for Jackson’s show had to enter the auditorium through the side door, the fact that it was open to blacks at all indicates a step toward integration. Linking popular music and the civil rights movement we can see that the vernacular development of a network of roadhouses open to blacks and whites aided the cause.

Singer Mary Ann Fisher, who traveled with Ray Charles between 1955 and 1958, told me about some of the ways that Charles challenged the racial prejudices he encountered in both the south and the north. She recalls,

Well we never could stay in the white hotels, no, *not then*.... We played in Vegas, we could not stay there, but we played there.... He decided he wasn't going to play no more like that. So we didn't play, we didn't play.... If our people couldn't sit there...and hear him play, he didn't play....

And then we rolled up [to] the gas station he said, "Fill it up." And you say, "You got a rest room?" "No." "Well then don't put no more gas in my car." And it was just like that. I said, "Ray you going to get us killed."
(Fisher 2001)

Public personalities such as Ray Charles were able to challenge racial segregation and civil injustices because of their popularity with black and white audiences, through their refusal to perform in white only venues, and through their increased spending power on the road. Charles's, and other musicians', boycott of segregated venues affected the viability of white only venues and used economic factors to realize integration. The Quonset Auditorium is an example of a venue that took advantage of this opportunity to capture both the black and white market. In this way, roadhouses open to both black and white peoples like the Quonset Auditorium did very well. After the Quonset Auditorium had closed, Ray Charles' recording of "Hit the Road Jack" was co-opted by songleaders in the civil rights movement. They chanted "Get Your Rights, Jack" to the same melody and drew upon the public's familiarity with this popular song to get their message across.

Similarly, many other black musicians utilized their public positions and popularity to push for civil rights. In 1956 the black musicians union sponsored blackouts during the Louisiana carnival season and refused to perform in segregated venues to support the Montgomery bus boycott. Their slogan was, "It is immoral for Negroes in New Orleans to dance while Negroes in Montgomery walk (Jones 87:27)." This carnival blackout lasted three years and helped draw attention to the national cause. Lloyd Price and Bill Doggett were other performers who used their popularity and public

position to push the window open for civil rights. This action led the way for the later work of musicians like James Brown with “Say It Loud (I’m Black And I’m Proud)” in the 1960s and for music to become a bigger part of the civil rights movement (Dahl 1999; Phillips 2002a).

Fats Domino, another musician who performed at the Quonset Auditorium regularly, has been criticized by black activists for not taking a hard stance against the separation of the races and for performing in white only venues. Domino is one of the first black musicians to make it really big with white audiences, starting in 1954 with his song “Ain’t That A Shame;” this success may not have been realized if he had been performing only on the chitlin circuit (Joyce 1977:19).

Lloyd Price, a musician important in the civil rights movement, also has links to the Quonset Auditorium. The Quonset Auditorium was one of the venues on Price’s tour circuit through the upper South. It was a convenient stop on the Dixie Highway as he played dates between his home in Louisiana and the big northern cities of Chicago, New York and Seattle. Price started touring the country to sellout crowds in 1952 with his hit “Lawdy Miss Claudy.” In an interview with Bill Dahl for *Living Blues* magazine in 1999, Price describes how white and black people were beginning to interact socially as they attended the same concerts and danced to the same music. Price explains,

Now this is about eleven months after “Lawdy Miss Claudy” is out [1952]. Maybe a year. But I was being hassled by the draft board to stop this. I’m Integrating the South. They was putting up ropes in tobacco barns and armories so everybody come see me. The white kids would be spectators if I worked for the blacks, and if I worked for the whites, the blacks would be spectators. They wanted to make sure that I was off the scene. (Price in Dahl, 1999:14).

The situation at the Quonset Auditorium was much like the one described by Price. He could very well have been thinking about some of his performances at the Quonset Auditorium when he made the statement above.

The Quonset Auditorium sat at a crossroads in the civil rights movement and provided a venue for influential musicians in the movement to perform, and where black and white people could share in popular music and culture during a time of social transformation after WW II. Local whites such as JC Hubbard (2001), Odis Blanton (2001), Bill Hovias (2001), Doug Bradford (2001), Mrs. Flynn (2001), Bobby Green (2002) and others who represented a new generation influenced by popular music and intrigued by black culture came to the Quonset Auditorium to witness the beginnings of a music revolution inspired by popular black musicians, and in so doing began to loosen the social norms of segregation in Bowling Green.

The Quonset Auditorium was a new type of venue in Bowling Green, where the city's first long-term integrated band was formed and where musical styles and influences were shared in response to popular demand for black music. Although the Quonset Auditorium closed in 1959, five years before the Civil Rights Bill was signed, racial barriers had begun to break down at the venue in part through the influence of popular black music as well as professional wrestling.

The Quonset's building is a physical reminder of the social transformation that occurred both during and after its time as an auditorium. Its structure provides evidence of the old days of segregation, with its separate entrance for blacks and segregated areas within the building, and can serve as a metonym of narrative for the civil rights story. The story becomes personal as audience members recall seeing performers such as Ray

Charles and Mahalia Jackson on stage at the Quonset Auditorium and connect this with social changes associated with black music and the civil rights movement. With hindsight, we are able to look at the side entrance of the Quonset Auditorium and reflect on the process of social transformation that has occurred since the Quonset Auditorium closed. This transformation can be attributed, in part, to some of the music performed on the stage, and in informal integrated jam sessions at the Quonset Auditorium and doubtless in similar settings around the country.

The stories of racial interaction at the Quonset Auditorium can be seen as part of a national trend taking place in similar roadhouses in the South where the ground was broken for integration. Some informants have been reluctant to provide details of racial interaction, and although the following conclusion touches on the subjective nature of memory, and the manifestation of this subjectivity in remembering sensitive issues, this is a topic that could be expanded on further in another study.



Figure 31 Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers in the mid 1940s. Promotional shot for WLBJ radio where they were regular performers at the time. Left to right, Tilford Kinser, Kenny Marshall, Joe Marshall, Curley Thomas, Bill Marcum. Photo courtesy, Joe Marshall.



Figure 32 The Quonset's New (and Integrated) Band, after the Quonset reopened after renovations in 1951. On the far left crouched behind the bandstand is one of the African-American members of the band, proceeding from the left to right is Bob Green, Ralph Stevens, Harry DuPuy, Joe Marshall (standing) and Connolly ?. Photo courtesy, Joe Marshall.

Conclusion

*“But I Was There When it Used to Glow
With All the Neon Lights Down the By Pass Row”*¹

Although the Quonset’s pink neon sign and green neon trim were taken down in 1959 when the auditorium closed, the building is still in its original location and for many inspires a sense of place associated with “the most happening place in town,” and the social changes taking place in the post-WW II era. Dolores Hayden writes, “Social memory relies on storytelling, but what specialists call place memory can be used to help trigger social memory through the urban landscape.” (1997:46)

The stories presented in this study represent different experiences and perceptions of the past, as well as different interests in the history of the Quonset Auditorium. Whether the Quonset is remembered for performances by recording stars, bears, local legends, or just as a good place to stop for a bite to eat on the way out of town, the Quonset Auditorium has become part of the collective memory of both the black and white communities of Bowling Green. Stories about the Quonset Auditorium are still being circulated in both these communities and continue to provide a social link between the two. Although stories about the Quonset are important in local history, they are also important in the context of social changes taking place in the post-WW II era.

The Quonset Auditorium operated during a pivotal point in music history. It witnessed the postwar boom of the recording industry, and served as a roadhouse for virtually all types of popular music of the day, ranging from local and regional legends to already famous recording artists. The Quonset Auditorium bridged a number of musical

¹ Excerpt from “Bypass Row” by Tommy Johnson. This song is about the commercial route of the Dixie Highway (U.S. 31 W Bypass) through Bowling Green on which the Quonset Auditorium was situated. See Appendix B for lyrics and reference information.

movements. It opened when country and R&B music were entering their commercial heyday after WW II and when local radio was a major part of the country music promotional machine. It closed as rock and roll was emerging and as television was replacing the role of radio for promotion and exposure of recording artists. The Quonset also provides a link to older entertainment traditions, such as barn dances and the carnivalesque tradition of circuses and tent shows, an example of which is Jerry the Bear, the most unique member of Joe Marahall's Rovin' Ramblers.

The Quonset is significant as the first music and entertainment venue in Bowling Green that served both African-American and European-American communities, and for forming the first long term integrated band in the region when Joe Marshall's Rovin' Ramblers teamed up with the House Rockers to create "The best dance band in southern Kentucky." (Park City Daily News, 01/02/1958) The story of the Quonset Auditorium helps to demonstrate how commercial interests contributed to the break down of racial barriers associated with the Jim Crow era. It is also significant as a venue where local and national commercial music networks intersected, whether it be Joe Marshall advertising upcoming dates on his live radio show or local R&B musicians performing as fill-ins with some of the top recording stars of the day. In either case local and national stars shared in the same experiences, which connects them as members of a folk group.

The Quonset Auditorium was positioned at a crossroads in race relations, a time when black music, facilitated by the commercial music industry, was becoming popular with both white and black audiences. At the same time the restrictive norms of racial segregation were still in force. Because the Quonset Auditorium operated during a pivotal point in race relations, having opened during a time of legal segregation, and

continueing to operate until five years after the 1954 landmark decision of *Brown vs Topeka Board of Education* which set the precedent for racial integration, discussing racial interaction is often a touchy subject as some of the emotions and sentiments from this time of conflict and change still linger.

Unresolved sentiment helps explain why some informants have chosen to avoid talking about race relations at the Quonset Auditorium. Religious values also have kept many informants from talking about dancing, drinking, and carousing, which were the main attractions at the Quonset Auditorium, as well as music, because talking about these things violates their identity as Christians. Race and religion have contributed to selectivity in choosing what to express to a documentarian such as myself compiling information for public display. This selectivity has certainly had an effect on the stories that have been collected during the course of this study.

Neil Rosenberg has written, "As is so often the case with oral history relating to sensitive events, what is unsaid is as important as what is said." (1985:78) With this insight in mind, we can understand the memory and history of the Quonset Auditorium better. Memories of the Quonset Auditorium are at a pivotal point right now -- at a figurative crossroads. The people who remember the Quonset at its height are aging, and as the Quonset slips into the realm of "postmemory," or memory separated from experience, to use Marianne Hirsch's (1997:22) term, the nature of the memories also change.

Stories from the Quonset Auditorium represent personal memory and collective memory. They have been subject to selectivity as they have been transmitted and maintained through individuals, and as these individuals have been influenced by public

history and public perceptions of the past. Memory can be more than nostalgic; it can actually shape and create new perspectives. Thus with the power of memory in mind, this study has attempted to place both the narratives and their narrators within a social and cultural context, so that we can better understand the people and their stories.

Stories about behavior perceived as immoral (drinking, dancing, racial mixing) tend to surface with those who do not have a direct link to the history, with people who are separated by generational or temporal distance. Kenny Bale has operated his tire business out of the Quonset since 1969, opening ten years after the Quonset Auditorium closed. Over this period of thirty three years, many people have asserted and maintained their experience of the Quonset Auditorium by telling Bale their personal experience stories. Although he never stepped foot in the Quonset Auditorium when it was in operation as an entertainment hall, Bale now has a collection of stories about the Quonset Auditorium that *he* tells -- ranging from drunken brawls, bootlegging, and killings, to a list of famous musicians who performed there. Because of his experiential distance from the Quonset Auditorium, Bale is able to express some of the more controversial elements associated with the post-WW II era and associated changes in race relations and moral attitudes without challenging his sense of identity or values. In this capacity, he has become a steward of some of this seemingly unsavory, yet revelatory history. Bale's stories about the Quonset Auditorium, and others that are in circulation, are part of the collective memory of the Quonset Auditorium. They may be altered and stretched versions of first hand accounts, but they continue to circulate as "postmemory" and as such keep the memory of the Quonset Auditorium alive.

During the course of this study I had a number of epiphanies, pivotal points where information fell into place, and I attained a new understanding of the Quonset's place in both local and national history. Revelations such as these often occurred as I drew links between information provided by different informants as well as archival sources. The Quonset Auditorium had one of the first integrated bands in Bowling Green, but this aspect of the Quonset's history was not mentioned by my informants; it only came up as Rovin' Rambler member Bobby Green's memory was jogged as he looked at a photograph of the Quonset's new dance band formed in 1951, in which a black band member is partially captured in the frame (Fig 32). With this new information, I began to ask informants specifically about this aspect of the Quonset Auditorium's history.

Months later, I was able to connect stories of a blind African-American drummer named Robert Henley (Thompson 2001) to the Quonset's integrated band when Bobby Green mentioned a blind drummer during an interview. Green could not recall the drummer's name, but when I mentioned Henley, he recalled that Henley was the drummer in the Quonset's dance band. This information led me to ask Robert Phillips (2002a) about Henley to see if he knew of him. Phillips remembered Henley well and went on to tell me that he himself had been part of the Quonset's dance band for a number of years, a detail he had not mentioned in earlier interviews.

Connecting these details, and sharing information between my informants helped document, what is to the best of my knowledge, Bowling Green's first longstanding integrated band. When we look at the context of the Quonset, in a southern segregated community, the integrated band of 1951 becomes a significant detail. This detail indicates that the strict rules of segregation were beginning to be relaxed and that the

Quonset was providing a venue where blacks and whites stood on almost equal ground, a place where blacks were valued for their musicianship and mentorship even if they had to enter through different doors.

Currently, the Quonset is at a figurative crossroads in terms of preservation. Although there are no immediate plans for altering the building's use as a tire store, it is within the official gateway to "Riverwalk," a new park being developed along the Barren River as part of Bowling Green's riverfront redevelopment plan that aims to gentrify the area and make it a leisure and tourist destination. Because of the Quonset's proximity to this public park, its physical prominence on the landscape, and its significance in local history there are opportunities for using the building to interpret its rich role in local and national commercial music history. At the same time, the owner has declined the opportunity to list the building on the national register, and expansion of the Bowling Green Municipal Utilities' (BGMU) water treatment plant from the adjacent property to the east has been discussed by BGMU's executive director (Plumlee 2000).

For these reasons and others the Quonset Auditorium's future is at a pivotal point. Instead of being viewed as an eyesore, a cheap prefabbed building associated with the declining commercial strip of 31-W, the building is becoming recognized as an important local landmark. This recognition has been sparked, in part, through the documentation and public presentation of the auditorium's history undertaken in relation to this study². Whether the building is preserved or not, I hope this study can serve as a reminder of

² - A traveling exhibit about the Quonset Auditorium researched and designed by Amber Ridington and produced by the Kentucky Folklife Program currently touring through area schools, libraries, museums, and festivals;

- An article published in the Bowling Green Landmark Association journal, Ridington (2002);

- Preparation of a National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the Quonset Auditorium establishing it as an eligible property for the register;

- An article by Mitchell Plumlee (2000) in the *Park City Daily News*.

what many who went there in its heyday have called “The Most Happening Place in Town.”

This study represents yet another version of the Quonset Story, and by no means does it claim to capture all aspects of the Quonset Auditorium’s history. One significant, and deliberate, omission has been the relationship of the Quonset Auditorium to the professional wrestling business, simply because that subject is beyond the scope and focus of this study. The Quonset’s popularity and success as a music venue was due to a number of factors: its location on a major travel route between Nashville and Louisville, two major music destinations, its use by musicians on both the local and national commercial music circuits, its availability to both the black and white tour circuits and local audience bases, its large size, and its variety of entertainment offerings.

This study has been based upon memories of the Quonset Auditorium representing some of the diverse experiences of the place. Through these narratives this folklorist has identified the role the Quonset played as a roadhouse on the regular tour routes of recording artists in the post-WW II era. Roadhouses have received little detailed attention in literature as regards commercial music; and this study is meant to provide details from the Quonset Auditorium in order to flesh out the generalizations often made about roadhouses and touring. Since it was constructed in 1947, the Quonset has stood at a literal crossroads, on the route of the Dixie Highway, and at the boundary of an African-American neighborhood. During its twelve years of operation it served as a cultural crossroads, providing a bridge between the African-American and European-American communities of Bowling Green and as a link between musicians on the local

and national tour circuits. The tale is in the telling, and through a contextual approach as utilized in this study we come to a fuller understanding of memory from the auditorium.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:	Full transcript of Narrative Stage with John Edmonds, Bobby Green, Joe Marshall Robert Phillips and Amber Ridington at the KentuckyFolklife Festival, Sept 29, 2001.....	2
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APPENDIX A

Full transcript of Narrative Stage with John Edmonds, Bobby Green, Joe Marshall Robert Phillips and Amber Ridington at the Kentucky Folklife Festival, Sept 29, 2001.

TRANSCRIPT

RECORDING LOG NO.: AR-01-04

INTERVIEWER: Amber Ridington

INTERVIEWEE: Joe Marshall, John Edmonds, Robert Phillips and Bob Green

DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 28, 2001

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Quonset Narrative Stage, Kentucky Folklife Festival, Frankfurt, KY

OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT: Live audience.

EQUIPMENT USED: Tape recorder (Morantz?) linked to a sound board. Individual mikes for each speaker. Taped by Kentucky Historical Society volunteer. Tape on file at the Kentucky Historical Society.

AMOUNT OF RECORDING (TAPE/MINIDISK) USED: : 1 tape (60 min)

DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS: Interview with four western Kentucky musicians about their influences, their early days in music and memories of performing at the Quonset Auditorium in Bowling Green, KY.

TRANSCRIPTIONIST: Pamela Hurley **DATE TRANSCRIBED** June 21, 2002
Transcribed with the support of a Transcription Grant from the Kentucky Oral History Commission, Kentucky Historical Society

KEY: R = Amber Ridington;

M = Joe Marshall;

P = Robert Phillips;

E = John Edmonds;

G = Bob Green

Italics = emphasis;

[] = comments not part of recording

// = overlapping or interrupted speech

Three digits in left column= tape counter (i.e. 000)

[begins with conversation between Jon Kay, the stage manager, and the recording technician]

R: Are you guys all ready?

All: Yeah! Sure!

R: Okay. Well, we're here this afternoon at the Kentucky Folklife Festival with a number of fine musicians from Kentucky and a lot of them are from Bowling Green. Um, we are wanting to talk about the music traditions of Kentucky this afternoon and have all of your insight and knowledge about, about how you [glitch] the music styles that influenced you, any favorite memories from playing

music all the years. So maybe I'll just have you all introduce yourselves and, um, say where you're from and a little bit about what you play.

M: Am I first?

R: You're first.

M: My name is Joe Marshall, Bowling Green, Kentucky, and I play fiddle.

R: Thank you.

G: I'm Bob Green, I now live in Louisville -- or Middletown, the edge of Louisville, and I've played with Joe off and on for many, many years and played at the Quonset and on the radio with him and also did other things for him: sold tickets for the wrestling matches, booked wrestling matches for him, those kind of things.

E: And I'm John Edmonds. I play, uh, gospel piano and also sing gospel music and I'm from Bowling Green, too.

R: Well we've got a bunch of different types of music coming from, from Bowling Green. Maybe you can talk about the influences -- w-, how you started playing music and, and what style spoke to you first and why you started playing it and...

M: Yeah, you want me to go first on that? I'm always glad to tell people how I got started playing. First, my uncle was a good old-time fiddler and I always liked fiddle but my daddy went to an auction sale one day at a country auction and they put up an old mandolin, a Taterbug mandolin. Now you have no idea what I'm talking about when I say Taterbug mandolin. It was the old ones that was built -- you never saw a taterbug, either. Back in the days he had [others laugh] *potato* bugs on the potatoes and they were a big round back and kind of stripped and a neck and some ears and things like that, and this mandolin was shaped just exactly like one. And people called them Taterbugs. One day I played for a school -- went out to talk -- and I took the old Taterbug mandolin and I said, 'Do y'all know what this is?' Little girl, hand up, said, 'It's a taterbug!' I was surprised she knew it was a taterbug. My daddy went to this auction sale and they put the Taterbug up for sale and he paid two dollars for it. And, I don't know, I was nine or ten years old and he brought it home and gave it to me for my instrument. Never played an instrument, of course, at that age, in my life. But I began to pick around on it and couldn't do any good with it until there's a family came from down in Alabama or somewhere. They were the Ganison [sp] brothers and they were musicians and they taught music. There was about five of them in the family and they booked the country schools or a church, wherever they could get a group together, and they charged, of course, for their music course for I don't know how many weeks, one night a week. And of course, everybody in town bought a guitar,

a mandolin, a fiddle, or something and I took my Taterbug mandolin over there. And I learned, they taught me a little about the mandolin and how to read a few notes and I began to play the mandolin, the Taterbug a little bit. And my sister -- How much time have I got?

All: [laugh]

062 M: And my sister was ready for high school. My uncle had brought a fiddle back from Germany -- he was in First World War, and he brought this fiddle back from Germany. And my sister, all of her life, she wanted to play violin, violin is all she ever talked about. And my uncle said, "Okay, when you go to high school, to College High..." -- they had a violin teacher there and had an orchestra and everything -- said, "I'll give you this fiddle." And she did. When she started, he brought the fiddle down, handed it to her and said, "This is yours." And, uh, she got to be a pretty good violinist. And as she went -- Now a fiddle, in her case is a violin and the mandolin is noted the same way and it's tuned the same way and the fingering on it is the same thing. So she told me, said, "Joe, you won't, they don't have, uh, Taterbugs in the orchestra." Said, "If you're going to go to high school, you need to play violin." I said, "Okay." I ordered a violin from Sears Roebuck. It cost eight dollars and some cents and I got my violin. And she had her lessons and she'd come back and, 'course I knew a little about the finger positions from the mandolin. And, uh, she came home and taught me everything she had learned I just kept right up with her and then, uh, about three years later when I started high school, then I took lessons from Dr. Weldon Hart [sp]. He was, uh -- Well, anyway, he was the violin teacher, he was a great violinist. And I soon, uh, became well enough, or to play well enough, he put me in the orchestra on a back seat, of course. And [by the] time I was a senior in high school I played next to the first chair. There's a girl could outplay me on the violin, and so I did play second chair. And, and from there -- I don't believe I could have ever learned an instrument by ear. I don't think I had the ear. I think my ear has been developed as I go along and I think I have a pretty good ear for music today. But at that time, if it had not been for the notes and learning to play the note and switching to ear and kind of pick it up, I don't believe I'd have ever learned. And, uh, that's the way I started. And then while I was a senior in high school, I liked the fiddle music and switched over to fiddling a little bit, and organized the Rovin' Ramblers when I was a senior in high school, sixty years ago. And I know -- Well, I wasn't but thirteen when I was -- uh, ten, or nine or something. Aw, come on. You wouldn't believe I was seventy-seven, would you?

[?]: Yeah.

R: Nope.

M: Now go to somebody else. Maybe they won't take as much time as I did. Thank you.

R: Well thank you. Well, yes, we've, we've got a member of your band with us. Bob, do you want to...

- 091 G: Well, uh, my story's not quite as long as Joe's, but even when I was a child, the biggest advance that happened at our school was when a band that played on the radio would come and put on a show at school. So I always liked -- uh, what was, we called cowboy music. We didn't use the term country music, I don't think. And we like those kinds of music. When I got, uh -- I was in high school and my dad had -- his family had an old guitar up at his sister's house and he talked her into letting me bring it home with me.

So I took it down to a man who was a good thumbpicker in our community -- he was a janitor of a school -- and he tuned it for me and I took it home. And, uh, that guitar was probably made in the late eighteen-hundreds or maybe early nineteen-hundreds. And he tuned it for me and I took it home and my dad played and sang "Whoa, Mule, Whoa." I didn't know he could play the guitar at all, but he did that for me. And then I ordered some lessons off the radio station for two dollars and they sent me ten lessons, one a week for ten weeks. And then I somewhat mastered those -- they wasn't much lessons, really -- and then I ordered the advanced course for ten more weeks.

And then I started going to the radio stations and being a guest on some programs at the radio station. And when I went to Bowling Green I met up with Joe and other musicians and they taught me a lot, learned from a lot of other guys. And so that's kind of the way I got into it and that pretty much is the story of my guitar playing.

R: Alright, thank you.

E: Ready for me?

R: Yes, we're ready for you, John. This is John Edmonds, for those of you who are just joining us.

- 110 E: I, I have to say the same thing that, uh, Joe said: I play a lot by ear now but I don't believe I could have developed my ear if I hadn't learned actually to play and read music. My parents *made* me learn to take -- they made me take piano lessons. I didn't want to but I don't regret it now. Um, I stuck with it for about maybe a year and, uh, when I wasn't able to play everything I wanted to I was very much discouraged. I expected after two lessons to be able to play. But anyway, uh, as I got older and my parents had a choir and I wanted to grow up and play for them, then I became interested in playing the, uh, piano again, so I started, uh, getting back into my studies.

Um, I actually started playing out for churches when I was like thirteen -- twelve or thirteen years old. I would play, uh, for Sunday school every Sunday morning.

And then when I was fourteen I actually got my first piano-playing job; I, uh, played for a youth choir at church, at a different church from where I belonged, and I got the, uh, huge salary of two dollars a Sunday. And that was my first [laughs] big job. And, uh, I think I've worked up to four, now. But anyway... [laughs].

But, uh, uh, I think, uh... The, the, [laughs] the thing that really made me want to get into singing gospel music, uh, was the first time I saw Mahalia Jackson on television and, uh, I decided at that point that I wanted to do this for a living some kind of way and it's paid off some, somewhat. Uh, there've been difficult times but there've been a lot of, uh, good times.

I organized my first group in nineteen-sixty- -- well, actually, '62. That group lasted two years and then I organized the group that I presently still have in 1964. Different personnel but it's still the same group. And we were all still in school then but, uh, when school would be out during the summer I would book us a tour out west to California going from church to church singing every night and, uh, on the way back. We wouldn't charge anything, we would just ask the people to provide food for us, places to stay, and to take up a free-will offering for us and that's how we would make it out to California and we would work our way back home. And we'd have a couple of dollars left-over when we got back home, for school. Um, that's about enough. I've talked as long as Joe anyway, I believe. [laughs]

R: Well thank you. Maybe I can introduce Robert Phillips who just joined us. Um, we're, we're talking about some of the influences and how you got started playing music and, uh, what things made you want to play and that kind of thing.

145 P: I guess, uh, [clears throat] -- excuse me -- um, I always liked music and I could bang around on the piano a little bit, you know. Trying to learn whatever, you know, without even, uh, uh, you know, any instruction or anything. But, and, uh, and then I used to go, uh, like, to the **Quonset**. I used to go up there when I was in high school. I think the first big band -- if I'm not mistaken, now -- **Count Basie** came through there and brought his band once. I think I went to see him.

Uh, then, uh, I guess the first, uh, professional job -- one of the first was Little Richard, because I'd been playing for him before he got famous. He, he was raised up in Clarksville, Tennessee. His name was Richard Penniman. And, uh, he had a band, a little band going for, oh, six, seven years before he finally got a record out. And I would, I'd been playing, you know, [?] playing for him a little bit. And, uh --

But after, uh -- Well, I played professional baseball, I guess, uh, from, in the Negro Leagues and I was played in the minor leagues, the Giants. We went from Class C to Double AA, and broke my ankle. So, uh, uh, then I, uh, my brother-in-law had purchase a, uh, saxophone and a book from a pawn shop. And he was

running everybody crazy "fool," or "scram" ["boo, boo"?] making all kind of noises, you know, and they'd tell him to put the thing down. [?] every time he got it out, he, [laughing] he couldn't learn anything because everybody was on his back.

So one day he got mad and "Here, you, you just, you just have the thing. You just have it." I had a cast on my ankle so I messed around. First I played, uh, well, about a year. And, uh, first I just traced the songs down and then, uh, learned each line, uh, uh, the b-, uh... I found out later that was the best way. Of course I didn't know what I was doing then, but I would let them sing a line and while he was singing that line I would be trying to find it before when he got to the next line. [laughs] You know, I could -- And you know every song, the first three or four lines are all the same. [Ain't?] got one middle. You know. If you can play the first part of a song, you can play the last of it and so, uh, that's what I was doing, uh, back, [back that far?].

And so, uh, uh, Upton Roundtree had a place there and he hired us to play. [clears throat]. Excuse me. We had a little band called the House Rockers and we were playing for him two or three nights a week. I didn't even have a car; I had to catch the bus.

Uh, that was back, uh, back in, uh, segregated times, you know, back [that was?]. So, I got hit on the bottom of the feet there about twenty times by the police had me in the bus station asleep with my feet up on the.... So they want to get you for loitering, you know. And uh, the first one got all the heaven knocked out of him, [laughing] because I was asleep and he hit at my feet and I, I -- it's just lucky another guy was with him. Well, lucky for me, I guess, because he was going to, he was going to tear my head up. But anyway, uh, after they knew what I was doing, they never did bother me no more. I'd, I'd go to sleep. I had to catch the two o'clock bus back to Franklin. I lived in Franklin. And that was, that was rough. I woke up in Nashville three times. [laughs, crowd laughs too]. So that, that's about the story of my --

And then Upton, uh, he got, uh, got into this booking [?] at the Quonset. So he got us to, uh, play, uh, behind some of the people that didn't want to bring all of their band, you know. I mean, of course, that was better for him, cheaper. So [?] he had us -- If they had records they sent them up and [?] brought them down to me and we, we had to learn them maybe before the weekend, you know. So that was pretty tough but we finally -- And we played them sometimes better than the guys on the record.

Uh, Memphis Slim offered me a job, uh, to go to Paris with him and he's, he died last year and he's been over there thirty-six years. And, um, that's how good we played, uh, uh -- What was that song he had out? Uh...Shucks, I can't think of the name of it now. Aw, shucks, I can't think of it now.

R: So you could be sitting in Paris. You could have been sitting in Paris right now.

206 P: I could have been gone, yeah. But anyway, I think I -- Aw, that's enough, I guess.

R: Well, thank you. What all of these musicians have in common, apart from coming from, uh, southwestern Kentucky is, um -- I believe they're all from southwestern Kentucky. I'm not sure... Bob Green -- where are you from, Bob Green?

G: Well, I am from western Kentucky, just twelve miles from the Mississippi River. A little town called Milburn [sp] in Carlisle County. And, uh, I went to Western to college, that's where I met Joe. Go down to the radio station, met him. And the music that I learned was not exactly like what they played in east Kentucky. We didn't particularly like Bill Monroe [sp] and bluegrass music. We played a more of a bluesy type music. Uh, they played, uh -- We liked country music, we liked western music but we never were very strong on the banjo.

And then of course when we got to Western, why, met Joe, we started playing dances. We would go to Hopkinsville and different places. And we played whatever was being played on the radio.

In those days it was Eddie [sp] Arnold song, Ernest Tubb song, uh, Pete 'Cowboy' Copas, folks like that. That's the kind of music we played. And we played some blues which is not very much different from what Robert played. And, you know, we could hit those same licks, those same.... They taught us -- We actually had an integrated band at the Quonset for quite a little while. There were, I think... Two white men -- we were politically correct -- two white men, two black men and a lady piano player. [laughs] So we were politically correct. [laughs more]

R: Now what year was that?

G: Oh, that was, that was in about the early fifties, somewhere along in there.

R: I was starting to say, one of the things that all of these musicians have in common is, um, playing at the Quonset in, uh, Bowling Green, Kentucky. And maybe Joe can tell a little bit about what the Quonset was and, and how it brought all these musicians together, in a sense.

M: Alright. You know, the Armory was the place there that everybody went. All of the country people from the Grand Ole Opry and people went to the Armory. They had a big floor up there and we had dances up there and shows up there. And it burned. Burned to the ground. And we were playing up there at that time. We were all very young.

So one of the announcers at the radio station said, "let's go down at", uh, uh, "Russellville, that armory building down there." And he rented the armory down there and we were with him down there and we drew the people down there. So my brother and Floyd Dunn who's in the band with us -- us three, we lived right close to each other down on Peachtree Lane -- and we got the big idea that we was going to build us an auditorium.

So we talked about it. First we pitched a tent. We pitched a tent down there on the corner of Center and, uh, Eighth and Center -- or Eighth and Kentucky, I don't remember it. So we put a floor in that tent and we moved everything in that for the summer. Well we did pretty good; drew in some pretty good crowds down there. Had wrestling matches in there, and I remember **Cab Calloway** played there and, uh, one time, and we booked the Grand Ole Opry people in there and it was a kind of a popular place to go, to that tent. A storm came up, blew the top off of it about mid-summer and, uh, we just put the walls around it and had bleachers and a floor and called it then The Open Air Arena. And we played dances in there until we like to froze to death. And the crowd stayed with us.

So Floyd and Kenny and I decided at that time there might be a little money in this thing, we didn't know. And, uh, we borrowed some money. Believe it or not, the bank trusted us with ten-thousand dollars and, uh, we built the Quonset.

The reason for the Quonset, it was quick, pre-fabbed already. And, uh, we got together and we were kind of car-, contractors and carpenters anyway; all of us had worked at that trade some [?] on the farm. And we put the Quonset up. And after we closed the tent along in October and we got too cold, I believe before Christmas we had the Quonset going.

Now it wasn't completed but it had a floor in it and we had a big pot-bellied stove in there and some wood and we started there and continued working on it.

And, uh, you know, not long we were wrestling in there and then we started booking groups in there and we had skating in there to start with. And the Mormon Church, they used it every Sunday. We just gave them a key to the place. We knew we could trust the Mormons. And, uh, they came every Sunday we'd clean up after a dance, we'd clean-up good and walk off and leave it and they had a key, they'd use it and we'd never know they'd been there. They left it just like they found it.

And, uh, then Upton Roundtree [local black promoter] came along, started booking the blues bands down there. He was the one that brought all of the *big* blues bands -- rhythm and blues bands in there. But then we had revivals in there, we had a wedding in there, as I said we had skating. We had wrestling in there one night a week, and you name it. The union people started meeting down there when they had meetings.

And it was open for anybody. If you had twenty-five dollars you could rent the Quonset one night and have what you wanted to have. But we had a little hamburger joint across the front [and I've just said?] that we, we sold a lot of hamburgers to those big crowds, about half-cooked hamburgers, run them across the grill and hand them out the window. There was a big window there. And one night back there, for some reason, I don't know who was there, it was one of the black bands and that thing was packed and jammed, somebody shot a pistol off in there and we found it later -- hole in the roof where it went through. And when that gun went off -- we were behind here waiting on them with drinks and hamburgers -- that crowd -- it was just like a big spring that you turn loose -- they came through that window right on top of us. [laughing] We had people came through that window right on top of us.

Well anyway, that wasn't very funny, but, but I'll never forget that night. Didn't have any trouble -- I don't know, somebody must've been dancing with another one's girlfriend or something and shot the pistol off. But anyway, the Quonset was there from '46, 1946 [historic documents from the Park City Daily News indicate it started in 1947] when we built it and we closed it down in 1959. I really don't know why we closed it unless it's one reason: my brother and I had already bought Floyd out. We paid him a little money, he was already married. And he just...

R: Is this Floyd Stamm [sp]?

M: Huh?

R: It's not Floyd Stamm?

292 M: No, no. Floyd Dunn. But he still played in the band and worked with us. He was a great comedian and tap dancer [and good?] and he played bass fiddle. We'd already bought him out. And at that time Kenny wasn't married and I wasn't married. Kenny was my brother. And we were getting up to a ripe old age in our thirties. And, uh, we felt -- I know he felt like I did -- we had no business with wives with the way we were traveling on the road and what we were doing.

And I don't think Jenny would have had me back in those days. And I think we had the same thing in mind but didn't say it to each other. But we did sell out and close out. He had his wife already picked out and I had mine. And we got married and went separate ways and had no problems at all, uh, but we did close it out.

But we continued our music. All of that time we went on the radio, we did two years with the Ralston-Purina Company in '62 and '63 [on television]. And I remember at that program the first year's contract was up and the Purina [?] at the dealers, they didn't really know how we were reaching out; they couldn't tell

really what was going on and they were in question of whether to renew that for the second year or not.

So we came up with the idea that we was going to do a tape -- this was a 45, not a tape. A recording. And we did. Through RCA, did this for us. We went to Nashville in the studio and recorded a number and we had about a thousand prints made and that very night at our TV show I went in front of the camera, didn't read it, didn't do anything, I talked just like I talk now. And I held the record up and said, "If you want this record, it's free. All you do is write me a postcard: Joe Marshall here at WLTV, Bowling Green, Kentucky. I'm going to send you this to show you our appreciation free of charge. I'll even pay the postage." That was Saturday night. Tuesday they called me down to the TV station, said, "Joe, come here and get this mail because we don't have anywhere to put it." So we sent out over seven-hundred of those records. [laughing] And I was married at that time, of course, and boy, our whole family started packing those records. And the TV -- And, uh, Ralston-Purina renewed us another year. So anyway, we enjoyed it.

R: Great.

[? Audience member]: Is the building still there? Is the building still there?

325 M: Yes, the building's still there as a tire company. We sold out and there was a wholesale grocery company went in there for their place and they outgrew it and two or three other things, but Bale Tire Company, a tire company has it today. And you need to go just straight up the other end of this area [points], there's a tent up there and it has a big arch of the Quonset in it and we play up there. Our group here, well, Bob and four other boys with us, we been playing up there all day today and all day yesterday. When will we be up there tomorrow? He can come up.

R: There's shows at noon, at two and four o'clock tomorrow.

M: At noon, twelve, and two and four o'clock. And, uh, Amber here has done a great job on collecting. She came out to my house and got all the pictures I had of the Quonset and everything else. Even Jerry the bear. We had a bear that toured with us. And the building, the building was uh, uh, forty by a hundred and twenty. The forty by a hundred was the auditorium part and the first twenty we finally opened a little hamburger joint across the front and the office is there. Now, when we moved wrestling in there they said we needed more space so we built a shed on the side of it and put bleachers out there. And at that time we could seat about a thousand people. And when you get a thousand people together in those days, you had a crowd.

[? Audience member]: So you guys made some money?

M: Well, we made a little money but, uh, we didn't wind up rich.

G: I wanted to add one thing. Uh, I sold tickets for him at the wrestling matches and, uh, that's where I met my wife. She came to the wrestling matches with some of her family and I short-changed her and I had to go in and make -- go in and find her in the audience and, uh, make corrections.

M: And he's been short-changed ever since -- or she has. She's been short-changed ever since. Bob, I had to say that.

G: Well, yeah, I've been fooling her for fifty-one years. That was fifty-one years ago. [laughs]

R: That's great.

G: I'll tell you that, you know, Joe always kept us busy. He knew we needed to make a little money. We sold tickets, we booked wrestling matches, we did all kinds of things, [kind of?] working.

R: Now talk, talk a little bit about the radio. I know you, you did a lot of advertisements for things at the Quonset on the radio?

357 G: Well, Joe could, uh -- We could advertise anything that, uh, we wanted to, anyplace we were going to appear. So we were on the radio station and Joe would book these, uh, big-name bands in, country bands, and tell everybody we were going to play a show and then they were going to follow us. What we were doing was just opening for them. And, uh, so then we'd play about fifteen, twenty minutes and then they came on and really did the show. There was no back door to the stage and I'll never forget Cowboy Copas [sp]: he hid behind the piano sometimes and, and then when his, his front man played a couple of tunes and they brought on Cowboy Copas and he was just like a jack-in-the-box, came right up from behind the piano. [laughs] But, uh, we did those kind of things and we did quite a few of them: Bill Monroe, uh, Ernest Tubb.... One time we played, uh -- went from there over to the radio station. Joe -- there was some kind of a charity drive going on in Bowling Green and, uh, Bill Monroe -- somebody offered a hundred dollars, Bill Monroe would sing something. We went over and played for him and he wanted to play in B Natural chord and Lordy Mercy, that was foreign to us and [laughing] we, but we went through it and when he got through he said, "Folks, my regular band wasn't here, they'd already gone to Nashville." [crowd laughs]

M: He turned around to us, said, "Boys, B Natural, B Natural." None of us knew where B Natural was! [crowd laughter]

[?Audience Member]: You figure -- You understand that.

M: I remember when he was there at the Quonset one show, he said, "Any requests? Any requests?" [?] 'Course he was expecting "Mule Skinner Blues," a little "Footprints in the Snow," his numbers. And that's why -- when, uh, mmm, "In the Mood" was popular back in those days, and the [?], "In the Mood." Well then somebody hollered, "Bill, play In the Mood!" He said, "I don't guess any one of us fellers knows that there tune, feller." He just went right on in. [crowd laughs]

R: John, maybe you can tell us a little bit about your connection with the Quonset and how, how people in, in the Shake Rag neighborhood, um, came to know the Quonset and what it, what it sort of meant to them.

391 E: Well my own personal experience with the Quonset was very limited. It was one of my first paying jobs, I was about twelve and, um, there was a, a cosme-, cosmetician. I think that's the proper word nowadays; we called them, um, beauty shop workers or whatever. They, um -- She had a beauty shop right across the street from my grandmother and, um, she was going to have a fashion show demonstrating some of the, uh, her hairstyles and some of the latest fashions. So I was hired to play the piano. But, uh, that was my one and only time at the Quonset.

But the Quonset was also, as, as Joe said, home for a lot of gospel shows. Uh, the world's greatest gospel singer, Mahalia Jackson came to Bowling Green to do a concert there; Claire Ward [sp] Singers; Rosetta Thorpe [sp]; they would all come through Bowling Green and, uh, would grace the Quonset with their presence and their concerts.

[?Audience Member]: What was the Shake Rag neighborhood? What was the Shake Rag neighborhood?

406 E: Uh, boundary-wise, uh -- Are you familiar with Bowling Green at all?

[?Audience Member]: Only that I've stayed up there on Scottsville Road.

E: Okay, starting at the river, going to probably Fifth Street, that's north and south, and from the railroad tracks over to High Street, east and west. That was the Shake Rag area.

[?Audience Member]: Where did the name come from?

E: It was a black community and a lot of the women of the community took in laundry to make extra money. And on Monday morning you'd drive through Shake Rag and you'd see a lot of rags shaking from the line. [crowd laughs] So, and I'm, I'm a product of Shake Rag. I grew up and I went to, went to church and I went to school. I was educated in Shake Rag.

R: It's -- Shake Rag is now a designated, uh, historic district on the National Register of Historic Places because there's a lot of, um, research has been done and preserving some of the buildings and, um, people's memories and stories about the place. And there's an exhibit in the next tent over that people can look at and learn more about Shake Rag.

But, I guess back to music here. [laughs] Um, maybe -- I know that um, maybe you, Mr. Phillips can talk to us about some of the, uh, big names that I know you - - some of your first paying jobs I, I've heard have been, uh, sitting in and being James Brown's band and that kind of thing. Can you tell us how that came to be?

431 P: Well to tell the truth: I didn't like James Brown, I couldn't stand him. [crowd laughs] He...he -- I don't guess he's known, I don't guess he ever knew my name, just, all he ever called me was, "Hey Sax, Hey Sax." [?] And um.... He was, uh, one of those guys that, uh, wanted to give you a big lecture before you get on stage.

And, uh, he said, "Now, if I -- before I pay my money out, I want a, I want a good show and I want everybody putting on a good show. So you guys can fight if you got to fight, don't like each other," pardon me for the words he'd say, but, "I don't give a damn." But, said, "You can fight before we play or fight after we play but when you get that stage you'll be just like brothers." [laughs] That was his motto. And uh, but uh, now he's one of the guys that was self-made, James Brown was. I, I, uh, I give him credit for that. Uh, he, he strived until he came up with something that people, uh, really could dance to. And uh, uh, and when I first started playing with him he, he didn't have a band, he had just he and the singers. Uh, [Blue Swings?] I believe they were, wasn't it? Was that the name of them, The Blue Swings?

R: Yep.

P: Uh, yeah. But, uh, then, after that, and then he, when he came on, boy you might as well get yourself some new energy from somewhere because he stayed out there for two hours or two hours and a half or... Then he was out here [?] in the crowd, you know, and all that. Yeah, man, he didn't know when to come home, I thought, but... [laughs]

But, uh...but that's the way it was. And, uh, different individuals, uh, B.B. King, uh, was, uh, he wanted you to know he was B.B. King. Uh, I know one night he, he was playing some kind of blues there and he hollered for me to take one. I, brother, I hadn't been taking one. [?] play, he hadn't heard me play anything, you know, by myself. I was playing with the rest of the band, rest of his group that he got. Well, I got into it, you know, I guess some of the people made a little noise or something, and he said, "Wait a minute now, this is the B.B. King show, now." [laughs] He was that type of guy.

Bobby Blue Bland was more of a regular, um, regular guy. And he'd [be there?] to get more out of them, uh, you know, more cooperation out of them. But, uh, there were quite a few that, uh... And then the worst ones, they couldn't stay in tune, they drifted from key to key, you had to catch -- run this key a minute and run down here and catch him. If he slurred this way you got to go to another key, and, uh, they just wore you out. And then he'll turn around and tells them, "Somebody's going to get fired if they don't play -- start playing this stuff right." [crowd laughs] And I told him, I go, "Don't you look in the mirror." [laughs] But it was, uh...

[G?]: Was that your last show? With him? [all laugh]

P: Some of them I made it my last show. I didn't, I didn't want to go through all that stuff. But it, it, it, it, it, it, it was just, it was just tough. I think the grand pay back then was, uh, twenty-five dollars a night and that was really good. Some people were making ten or twelve. But, uh... I... [?] I would have been going along, you know, with somebody, but I had just got married and, uh, that's the only thing got, saved me from being all over the place.

R: Now those, um, those musicians who would play when their, they play on the -
-What's it called, the chitin circuit, coming through?

P: Yeah.

R: Did that go along the Dixie Highway?

507 P: Well, let's see. We started playing uh, we also played for a guy out of Clarksville, and, uh, a booking agent. He was doing the same thing Upton was. And we started in Clarksville and we went to Hopkinsville and we went to, uh -- what's the next little town over down by Hopkinsville there? [answers come from off mic] Yeah, and well, May-, yeah, right, and went to Madisonville, uh, and Arlington [sp].

[?]: You called that the Chitin Circuit?

P: Chitin Circuit.

[?]: [?]

P: Well, I don't know. But anyway, uh, that's the way we went and around and round and maybe back to Bowling Green, depend on how much time is.... These guys were, uh, doing it at a cut-rate price, so it would depend on, you know, how much, how much time they had to do it. So that's, that's, uh...

R: So did they have a main destination? Like they'd play the weekends in Nashville or Louisville and then stop in these smaller places on the off, on the sort of weeknights?

P: They were either, they either had played in Louisville or booked in Nashville, maybe end of the week or something and to pick up more money they took on this thing here. Uh, and, uh, that's, that's the way it happened most the time. Either coming or going from Nashville or Louisville. Yeah.

R: Great.

536 M: Yeah, Amber, could, could I have a little here? In our band, The Rovin' Ramblers, we had a bear, a real, live bear. Jerry the bear. I bought him as a cub from a circus. And I fooled with that bear and, and trained him to do a few little things and then we booked the bear along with us. And the bear drew a pretty good crowd in those days. We didn't draw it, the bear did. And Bob will know, Bob will remember this:

It was just pouring down rain, the bear was in a trailer -- we pulled him in a trailer, of course, behind the car. That's when we all piled up in the car. The bass fiddle stood across the seat inside. Three people in the front and two on the back. And uh, and their instruments was all packed in the trunk and then the bear was tied on in a trailer. And one night it was just pouring down rain and we had a flat on the trailer with the bear. [all laugh]

You know, the way we divided the money, the bear got a portion, he got his portion. Well, I owned the bear, see. [all laugh] And, you know, and Bob will tell you, he was with the rest, the other three or four boys. They'd sit in the car, they wouldn't get out, said, uh,
 "The bear's making his own money, let the bear fix the tire." [all laugh]
 And, and then, and then [?] even one of them had the nerve to say,
 "And if you fool with me, I'm going to tell the bear that you're keeping his money."
 Remember that, Bob?

G: I sure do. I can tell you where it was, too: it was in Short Creek.

M: [?]

G: We'd crossed a railroad. We'd played at Short Creek, I guess, and crossed the railroad at Cadiesville [sp]. I think that's where it actually happened.

569 M: It was in that area. And, uh, one night, uh, we were on the way -- We had a tent show out -- now that's not the big tent we've got. We had a little tent, army tent, would seat two-hundred people and we'd played schoolhouses. One-room,

two-room, anything, we'd book it and play it. If we made a little money, okay and if we didn't, okay; having a lot of fun.

We book-, we bought that little tent one summer. When school's closed up, which was about four or five months during the summer, we didn't have school, so we'd bought this tent. And we'd go set it up in a big [store?] somewhere out in the country, you know, and advertise it and [he'd have to?] advertise it. And we had tent shows all of that summer. Well, the boys would start gambling with each other, "How much you give me for my part tonight? Two dollars? Four dollars? Five dollars?" Five was big. And we'd gamble with each other [by buying one out?].

Well it was just pouring down rain, I mean just a flood of rain, you know, and we was on our way to the tent. And, uh, nobody wanted to buy anyone out so, uh, Floyd finally bought Kenny out for two dollars. So Kenny had two, two dollars and, uh, with nobody else to buy. "Uh-uh. No, I'm not going to give you two dollars." We was afraid we wouldn't even -- We had to pay for the man to set the tent and all.

Anyway, we got over there and we got out and got in the tent, we was on a truck. Big truck bed was our stage. Well we got out and tuned up and started fooling around. Time for the show, nobody was there. Still just pouring down rain. So we was just jamming, just messing around with ourselves. Thought, well, we're going to have to take this thing down and go home. I looked at the tent, it had quit raining, the moon was shining, we saw lanterns coming through fields. Looked like a bunch of lightning bugs, they were coming from all directions. And that tent started and I told the guy that set the tent to get the tickets. He was the ticket seller. He grabbed that thing and we had that tent about two-thirds full, which was a good crowd after the rain quit.

Well, Floyd was a comedian. He'd pull a joke, nobody would laugh, just sit there, just sit there. Couldn't get them to laugh. Now he was a good showman and knew how to handle it. And after a while he just took his head around in front of the mic like this to the people and said, "Well what do you people expect for two dollars anyhow?" And they just roared, they roared laughing. And they didn't even know what the joke was. So from that night on, we had a real good show. He broke them over, Bob, and we played a good show. But he was good at that.

R: Thanks.

620 P: We had a few of those remarks, there were a few remarks made in our group about the bear, too. [crowd laughs] I went on -- A couple of them got mad one night or something. I don't know whether it was bad weather or not enough money or something but they weren't [?]. So when we got ready to play, one of them told me, said,

"Look, I don't know where in hell this band going, we're opening up for a bear."
[all laugh]

M: That bear played a big part around the Quonset. He started through the window one night there in that little restaurant. Didn't have air-conditioning, the window was open. Well the bear got loose and he headed for that window and was coming through that window. Estelle was the girl worked in there and boy she went out the front door screaming. And I got there

END COPY TAPE 1

COPY TAPE 2

641 G: [?]. . . and boy, he cleared out the first eight or ten rows in a hurry. [all laugh]
Joe grabbed the chain. The bear wasn't after anybody but they didn't know it. But he went after that popcorn and they cleared it -- gave him plenty of room.

[?]: What happened to the bear?

M: Well it's a long story and I'll make it as short as I can. The bear did get me down on a real snowy night one time and wouldn't let me up and he was nibbling on me. I always thought and I believe today the bear was playing with me, but he played a little rough and I have a few scars. And I could not get out and was about to give up. Well anyway after that I didn't trust the bear, I didn't show him anymore.

They was having a March of Dimes program on the radio -- if y'all are familiar with any of your towns have done that for the March of Dimes. You'd call in, you know, and people would donate stuff and you'd call in on the phone and bid on it. I gave the bear to the March of Dimes. Well, some nut... Well now, what we decided to do -- I, I'm wrong there -- we decided to take him up to the Armory, that's when they were having the wrestling matches up there. I would bring the bear up there and bring him in the ring and they was going to auction him off.

So the auctioneer from the stockyard came up and auctioned that bear and some crazy nut gave fifty dollars for the bear. Because I was through with him, I was not going to use him anymore. Took him down to his farm in Woodburn [sp]. He had him in a nice stable. I had to make him promise to take care of the bear. And he had him in a nice stable, oak lumber just real thick and everything in that barn stable. Straw for him, said, "I'll feed him, take care of him." I was pleased. Put the bear in there and said, "Will that keep him?" Said, yeah, "He'll be alright until Spring." This was in the wintertime. "When Spring comes, he'll gnaw through that wood." "Aw, he won't do that."

And sure enough, along in April, the first warm days, they called and the bear was loose. The bear had gnawed through that [laughs] and they couldn't find... you know. And the sheriff went down there with a -- what is it? Is it a forty-four? What they hunt dear with. A big rifle. He went down and shot him. Okay, that's not all of the story. I'll make it as fast as I can.

They had a bear steak dinner and the guy that, uh -- Robert, you'll probably remember him. Who was it there on the old Russellville Road did barbecue? Had a great -- Bob, Bob Hurry [sp]. He was a great man for barbecue. So he barbecued the bear and had bear steaks and invited everybody from the radio auction to come... I think everybody went and had some of that bear but me. Brother, I did not go. I didn't want a bite of that bear. Now he got a bite or two on me, but I, I wasn't going to get even. So that's what happened to the bear. And I don't mind telling you, I, I see his ghost now, now every so often in my dreams I'll see a ghost of Jerry the bear.

R: Well thank you. This is -- That's about all the time we have right now but the evening, this evening's concert on the main stage is um, going to feature all of these performers and um, I think this um, this narrative stage has just sort of showed the diversity of music that was brought together in one spot and that um, comes from the same loca-, the same area of Bowling Green, Kentucky. And I think the Quonset is a -- everyone has special memories. It's a little piece of history there. And you can also go to the Quonset tent and look at pictures of Jerry the bear. He's there. Thanks.

M: Bob's in one of those pictures up there, too.

R: Yup. Bob's in them, Joe's in them...

[?]: How often did the band change?

677 M: Did the band change? I don't know how to say. If one left town we'd pick up another one. But one time at the Quonset -- if you go up there you'll see the picture -- we had a, a, a, we called it popular music. We had a saxophone -- We had a mandolin player was left-handed, one of the best mandolin players I ever heard in my life and when we switched over to our popular music, he said, "Well I don't believe we got any room for a mandolin in here." And his daddy played the saxophone, alto sax. He said, "It's home in our attic, I'll go home and get it." This boy was a natural musician. What'd it take him, two or three weeks?

G: Well, the first Saturday night he knew one song, the second Saturday night he knew two, the third Saturday night, three and it wasn't long and he could just play anything he'd want to on saxophone.

M: And he got -- He was a great guy on saxophone but he could still play on mandolin. He was a left-handed, played the mandolin upside-down. So we had,

what? A coronet? The guy at Western music department came down to play coronet with us and uh, I don't know, was it // [?] used to play with us?

G: // Had piano... Had piano, lead guitar, saxophone, trumpet, drums.

M: And I played drums. I switched to fiddle to drums when we still had our square dances and I'd grab my fiddle and we'd do a square dance. And that's when we really started packing the house. Every Saturday night. It was a lot of country music around but they didn't have any good dance bands like ours. [laughs] Got that in! [all laugh] And we, we just, every Saturday night we knew we was going to have a full house, right Bob?

G: Yeah, or close to it. [laughs]

694 R: Well, thank you all. And, uh, let's hear it for them. [applause]

APPENDIX B

Song Lyrics

“On The Dixie Bee Line (In That Henry Ford Of Mine)”

Uncle Dave Macon. Brunswick Recording 112-B. Recorded April 14, 1926

Transcribed by Amber Ridington from a 78 RPM record archived at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Nashville, TN.

Some folks said that a Ford won't run
Just let me tell you what a Henry done
She left Louisville about a half past one
Oh, she got into Nashville after settin' of the sun

(Chorus)

On the Dixie, On the Dixie Bee Line
Gonna rise and a' shine, a' gonna stay up the time
Rise and shine I'm gonna keep up the time
When I ride in that Henry of mine

Henry Ford wants a Muscle Shoals
To bring to the people of the South pure gold
“Let him have it” said the oh my Lord
The Lord right didn't want a Henry Ford

(Chorus)

That old Buick set ya' three days by mean
Took all my money for to buy gasoline
She may be one (warm?) but I don't know
But a Buick won't come where a Henry will go

(Chorus)

Went to the modern for to get some booze
The Henry Ford car was the one I choose
The officers got right on me I say
I pulled her wide open and made my get away

(Chorus)

Everybody knows that Henry Ford car
Every body knows they're the best they are
If you want to take a ride just get in a Ford
And set another time tell the oh my Lord.

(Chorus)

On the Dixie, On the Dixie Bee Line
Gonna rise and a' shine, a' gonna stay up the time
Rise and shine I'm gonna keep up the time
When I ride in that Henry of mine

"By Pass Row"

By Tommy Johnson. Neron Records, Hartsville, Tenn. (1980s?)
Transcribed by Amber Ridington from 45 speed record provided by Odis Blanton,
Bowling Green, KY.

Once upon a time this was a nightclub town
Until the interstate came and they shot it all down
Too many driving while drunk closed a lot of doors
Now nobody wants to come and see the band no more

(chorus)

But I was there when it used to glow
With all the neon lights down the By Pass row
If you told me then what now I know
I'd 'a said, "Well that'll make the death of the By Pass row"

Riverside Drive-In closed today
Now she's looking like a ghost and I lost my way
The old Sunset Inn isn't there any more
I guess the Blue Star Rangers ain't together no more

(chorus)

The new age is in and the old days are gone
Now there's some brand new faces singing brand new songs
But the old cats like me still hang around
You can find us on yesterday's part of town

(Chorus)

Yeah, The By Pass row
The death of the By Pass row
The By Pass row

APPENDIX C

Advertisements for events at the Quonset Auditorium from the *Park City Daily News* 1947-1952, 1955, 1956, 1958 (9 of the Quonset's 12 years of operation). Arranged in chronological order by year.

NOTE: This excludes advertisements for wrestling matches, advertised regularly in the *Park City Daily News*.

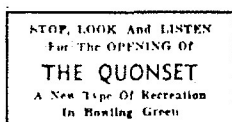


Figure 1 Stop, Look and Listen for the Opening of the Quonset, A new Type of Recreation in Bowling Green. *Park City Daily News* 12/05/194.



Figure 2 Opening Soon The Quonset Bowling Green's Newest and Most Modern Recreation Center. *Park City Daily News* 12/23/1947:7.



Figure 3 Every Saturday Night Barn Dance Music and Entertainment by Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers - Basketball at The Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 12/26/1947.



Figure 4 Now Open the Quonset. Bowling Green's Newest and Most Modern Recreation Center. *Park City Daily News* 12/28/1947:4.

NEW YEAR'S EVE
DANCE
 DECEMBER 31--HOURS 9:00 P. M. TO ?
 Enjoy Both Round And Square Dancing
 MUSIC BY
JOE MARSHALL
 AND HIS
ROVIN' RAMBLERS
 AT
The QUONSET
 First and State Streets Admission 60c
 Tax Included

Figure 5 New Year's Eve Dance Music my Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers at the Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 12/29/1947:5.

1948 (searched whole year)

The QUONSET
 Brings You A SPECIAL
 ATTRACTION
 FOR THE SATURDAY NIGHT
JAMBOREE
 IT'S
 "Pappy" CLAYTON McMITCHIN
 and his
GEORGIA WILDCATS
 A 10 Piece Dixie Land Modern Swing Band
 ROUND AND SQUARE
DANCING
 HOURS 8 TO 12 ADMISSION 75c
 FIRST AND STATE STS.

Figure 6 The Quonset has "Pappy" Clayton McMichen and his Georgia Wildcats For Every Saturday Night Jamboree. *Park City Daily News* 01/01/1948:1; 01/09/1948; 01/16/1948:7.

What You Have Waited For
ROLLER SKATING RINK
NOW OPEN
 The Only Skating Rink In The City!

Today, Sun., 2:00 p.m.
 SEATING TOTAL 144 P. M.
 1st Session
 2:45 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
 2nd Session
 8:00 p.m. to 10:15 p.m.
 NIGHT SESSION
 8:00 P. M. TO 10:15 P. M.
 Admission 25c
 * ALL NEW SKATES * * A NEW FLOOR *
 * Bowling Green's Newest And Largest Skating Rink *
The QUONSET
 CORNER 1ST AND STATE

Figure 7 Roller Skating Rink Now Open The Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 01/11/1948:5.

For Skating Pleasure
Come to
The QUONSET

Today's Schedule
First Session
2 P. M. to 3:45 P. M.
Second Session
3:45 P. M. to 5:30 P. M.
Night Session
8:30 P. M. to 10:15 P. M.

Skating
Tues. & Fri. Nights

* ALL NEW SKATES * A NEW FLOOR

ADMISSION PER SESSION—15c TAX INCLUDED
FIRST AND STATE STREETS



Figure 8 For Skating Pleasure come to the Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 01/18/1948.

The
QUONSET
Presents
MARTIN BROS.
INDOOR
CIRCUS

ONLY 1 DAY
Fri. Jan. 30



Kids "Matinee" 3:15 P. M.
Children 30c
Adults 60c, tax incl.

NIGHT
7 P. M. and 9 P. M.
Adults \$1.20, tax incl.
Children 60c

20 ACTS 20
30 PEOPLE 30

Starring
"Buck Steele"
Cowboy Movie Star
and His Educated
Animals direct
from Hollywood

COUPON
With This Coupon
will be admitted
for the price of
2 1
MARTIN BROS.
INDOOR CIRCUS

Figure 9 The Quonset presents Martin Bros Indoor Circus. *Park City Daily News* 01/28/1948.



Figure 10 WSM Presents Grand Ole Opry Star Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys plus the Blue Grass Quartet featuring Chubby Wise, Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs, Cedric Rainwater Plus Bradley Kincaid Also Joe Marshall and His Roving Ramblers at the Quonset Auditorium. *Park City Daily News* 02/02/1948.

This ad is for one of the last performances of Bill Monroe with his classic band. Chubby Wise had already left Monroe's band, so he did not perform as listed on the ad copy, but according to Tom Ewing (2002), Flatt, Scruggs and Watts were with Monroe for about a week after this performance, and Scruggs stayed with Monroe until close to the end of February).



Figure 11 Biggest Show in Town. WKCT Saturday afternoon Frolick live from the stage of the Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 02/23, 26/1948.



Figure 12 Pee Wee King and his Golden West Cowboys RCA Victor Recording Stars plus Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers of WKCT. *Park City Daily News* 02/23, 26/1948.



Figure 13 WSM Paul Howard and his Grand Ole Opry Gang also Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers of WKCT. *Park City Daily News* 03/21, 23, 24/1948:11.

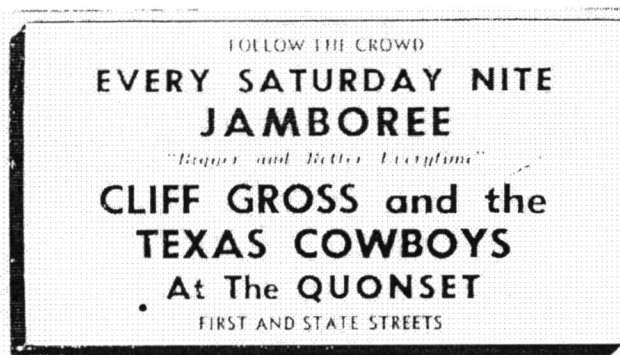


Figure 14 Cliff Gross and the Texas Cowboys at the Quonset, Every Saturday Nite Jamboree. *Park City Daily News* 03/26/1948:9.

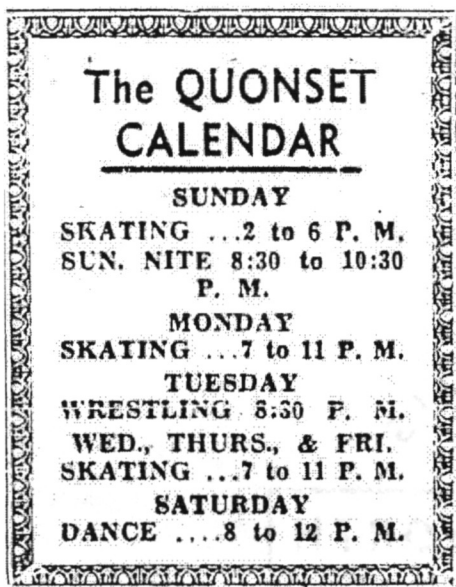


Figure 15 The Quonset Calendar: Skating, Wrestling, Dance. *Park City Daily News* 04/29/1948:13.



Figure 16 Sat. Nite Big Barn Dance at the Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 05/21/1948:5.



Figure 17 WSM Milton Estes, the old Flour Peddler and his Musical Millers and Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers. Also Wrestling at the Quonset Admission 50c & 75c. *Park City Daily News* 05/30, 31/1948.

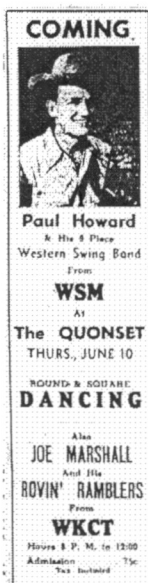


Figure 18 WSM Paul Howard & his 9 Piece Western Swing Band at the Quonset also Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers from WKCT. *Park City Daily News* 06/06/1948:2.

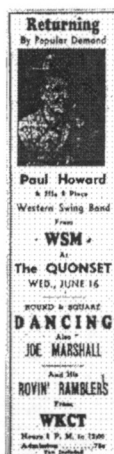


Figure 19 Returning by popular demand WSM Paul Howard & his 9 Piece Western Swing Band at the Quonset also Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers from WKCT. *Park City Daily News* 06/13/1948:2.



Figure 20 Now on WKCT Tune in at 7:15 Monday Thru Saturday Joe Marshall and his Rovin' Ramblers. *Park City Daily News* 08/22/1948.



Figure 21 Sat. Nite Big Barn Dance at the Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 09/17/1948 (also ran July 16, 30, ...Dec 4).

**UNCLE BOZO'S
BIG RADIO
JAMBOREE**

And
SQUARE DANCE CONTEST
IN BOWLING GREEN AT
THE QUONSET

FRI. NITE, OCT. 22, 8 P. M.

Featuring Bowling Green's own Floyd Dunn in a
dancing contest against Uncle Bozo from Glasgow.

Also 4 sets of champion square dancers coming to dance against U. G. dancers for cash prizes.

Band contest, fiddlers, guitar, tinet, fiddle, and Jitterbug contest, The Walker family and many others.

ADMISSION 30c AND 60c

Figure 22 Uncle Bozo's Big Radio Jamboree and Square dance Contest at the Quonset. Admission 30c and 60c. *Park City Daily News* 10.20/1948.

**BACK At The QUONSET
WRESTLING**

Starting
FRI., OCT. 29, 8:30 P. M.

<p>MARTINELLI From New York, Wrestling 180 lbs.</p> <p>STRATTON From Cleveland, Ohio, Wrestling 180 lbs.</p>	<p>VALENTO The Bull Fighting from Mexico City, Wrestling 200 lbs.</p> <p>VANSKEY From Boston, N. E. Wrestling 200 lbs.</p>
--	--

Don't miss these exciting matches... all in one session in Bowling Green, Michigan at the Quonset every Friday night.

**OPENING
*
ROLLER
SKATING
at the
QUONSET
*
SUNDAY
OCT. 24
1 SESSION
Begin
2:30 P. M.**

Figure 23 Opening Roller Skating at the Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 10/20, 21, 22, 24/1948:11.

Station *Wally Fowler* presents

GRAND OLE OPRY

Star
WALLY FOWLER



**FAMOUS SONG WRITER
AND RECORDING ARTIST OF**

I'm Sending You Red Roses
Just Thirteen Steps Away
You Can't Conceal a Broken Heart

and His Famous
OAK RIDGE QUARTET

Best Known Artists
Gospel Singers

DON'T DARE MISS IT!

- 2 -

GREAT SHOWS

FIRST SHOW

2:30 P. M.

SECOND SHOW

8:30 P. M.

★

**SUNDAY
NOV. 7**

★

At The

QUONSET

25 outstanding singers
and several quartets. He
has for some great sing
ing

Figure 24 Grand Ole Opry star Wally Fowler and his famous Oak Ridge Quartet. *Park City Daily News* 11/03, 05, 07/1948:8.

1949 (searched whole year)



Figure 25 WSM, Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys plus the Blue Grass Quartet, also Shanandoah Valley Trio, and The South's Funniest Comedy Team "Shufly" And "Buckeye Sennzleweed" at The Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 01/16/1949.



Sunset Carson, popular Hollywood movie star, who is well known for his many appearances in Western movies, will be at the Quonset tomorrow night to try his hand at refereeing the weekly wrestling bouts. Appearing in the doubleheader match will be Floyd "Red" Byrd against Johnny Carlin in the first go at 8 p. m., and Jack Welch against "Tarran" Ed White.

Figure 26 Sunset Carson refereeing wrestling at Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 01/20/1949.



Figure 27 Sat. Nite Big Barn Dance “Bigger and Better Everytime” in 1949. Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 03/18/1949.



Figure 28 Don “Red” Barry Famous cowboy movie star refereeing wrestling matches. *Park City Daily News* 04/22/1949.

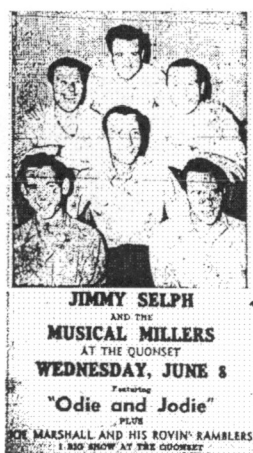


Figure 29 Jimmy Selph and the Musical Millers at the Quonset Featuring “Odie and Jodie” plus Joe Marshall and his Rovin’ Ramblers. *Park City Daily News* 06/05/1949:9.



Figure 30 Air Cooled Barn Dance at the Quonset. Every Saturday Night. Good Music, Free Tables. *Park City Daily News* 08/12/1949:7; 10/21/1949:7.



Figure 31 Big Barn Dance at the Quonset. Sat. Nite. Good Music, Free Tables. *Park City Daily News* 10/21/1949.



Figure 32 WSM's Curley Bradshaw with the Rovin' Ramblers. *Park City Daily News* 11/18/1949:7.



Figure 33 Marjoe Gortner World's Youngest Evangelist. *Park City Daily News* 11/20/1949:4.

1950 (searched whole year)

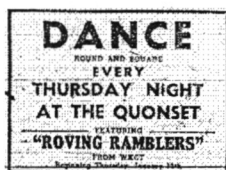


Figure 34 Dance Round and Square every Thursday Night at the Quonset Featuring "Roving Ramblers" from WKCT. *Park City Daily News* 01/10/1950:3.



Figure 35 Dance Sat. Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 01/25 - 05/22 /1950.



Figure 36 Grand Ole Opry Stage Show starring Cowboy Copas and his Oklahoma Cowboys plus "Sugarfoot" Garland & "Lazy" Jim Day All in one big Jamboree at the Quonset. Fri Nite - Jan 27. *Park City Daily News* 01/26/1950.



Figure 37 Grand Ole Opry Cowboy Copas in person and his Oklahoma Cowboys featuring "Lazy" Jim Day at the Quonset Tonight. *Park City Daily News* 01/27/1950.



Figure 38 Marjoe is back in Bowling Green at the Quonset. 1000 Free Seats. *Park City Daily News* 04/20, 23/1950.

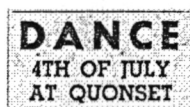


Figure 39 Dance 4th of July at Quonset. *Park City Daily News* 06/29/1950:3.



Figure 40 Howdy Forrester one of the nation's leading fiddlers and entertainers in the American folk music field is billed to appear one night at Quonset, July 4. *Park City Daily News* 07/02/1950.

1951 (searched whole year)



Figure 41 The New Quonset Presents: 'Ace' Dinning & Orchestra Every Saturday Night. For Your Dancing Pleasure Couples Only. *Park City Daily News* 09/02, 20/1951:8.



Figure 42 Dancing Nightly at the New Quonset. Music by "Ace" Dinning and Orch. Mon.-Fri.-Sat. *Park City Daily News* 09/09, 11/1951.

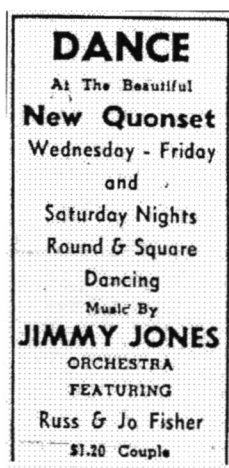


Figure 43 Dance at the Beautiful New Quonset Wednesday - Friday and Saturday Night Round & Square Dancing music by Jimmy Jones Orchestra Featuring Russ & Joe Fisher. *Park City Daily News* 10/03/1951.

1952 (searched whole year)



Figure 44 Joe Templeton and his Rhythm Masters featuring Johnnie Maddox, Pianist at the Beautiful New Quonset. Dancing Saturday Night. *Park City Daily News* 01/24/1952.



Figure 45 Dance at the New Quonset Saturday Night featuring music by the Tads. *Park City Daily News* 02/29/1952.

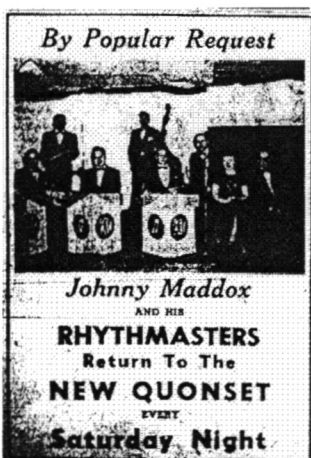


Figure 46 By popular request, Johnny Maddox and his Rhythm Masters return to the New Quonset every Saturday Night. *Park City Daily News* 03/21/1952.



Figure 47 The New Quonset Show & Dance starring Bob Jennings and his Corn Millers Featuring cousin Lilly White and Andy Johnson. *Park City Daily News* 11/09/1952:2.

1955 (searched whole year)

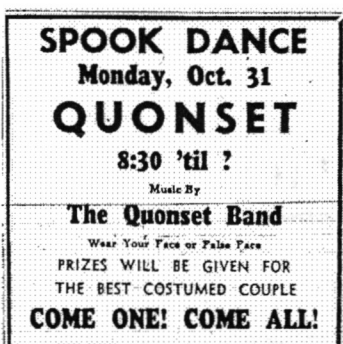


Figure 48 Spook Dance, Oct 31 Quonset. Music by The Quonset Band. **48** *Park City Daily News* 10/30/1955.



Figure 49 At Quonset Auditorium Teuber Evangelistic Party. Bring the Sick - The Lame - The Deaf. Mass Rally Each Sunday at 3 P.M. For All People of All Churches. *Park City Daily News* 12/08/1955:2

MARJOE IS COMING TUESDAY!
World's Youngest Evangelist
 (AT AGE 3)

THE MOTHER FAMILY
 * SEE HIM PLAY THE ORGAN.
 * THRILL TO HIS GOLDEN SAXOPHONE.
 * HE WILL PLAY HIS BIG STONE BELL.
 * WATCH HIM PLAY 120 BARS ACCORDION.

9 YEAR OLD VERMOE
 SONG DIRECTOR
 AND
 GAZON VOICES SOLOIST.

Don't Miss
 1 YEAR OLD
MARY STARLOE
 AS SHE SINGS.

The Miracle Child
 HE'S 11
 FROM IDAHO
 MIRACLES
 AND WONDER

At The QUONSET FIRST & STATE STS.
Tuesday, Jan. 3 thru Friday, Jan. 13
 (EXCEPT WEDNESDAYS & SATURDAYS)
 7:45 p.m. - Great Sun, Afternoon Rally at 2:30

HE HAS PREACHED A THOUSAND
 CONGREGATIONS - FROM
 25 LBS. OF WEIGHT -
 HIS BIG BROTHER, FIVE
 YOUR SOUL.

Figure 50 Marjoe is coming Tuesday! World's Youngest Evangelist at the Quonset Tuesday Jan 3, thru Friday, Jan 13. *Park City Daily News* 12/30/1955:5

1956 (searched Jan through to the end of June)

At The
QUONSET

COMING - AMERICA'S NO. 1 ENTERTAINING BAND IN PERSON

TED WEEMS
 HIS ORCHESTRA
 and GALAXY of STARS

FRIDAY, APRIL 6
 9:00 p. m. to 1:00 a. m.

For Reservations - call VI 3-4548

Figure 51 Ted Weems - America's No. 1 Entertaining Band. *Park City Daily News* 04/13/1956.

Have You Heard The
QUONSET'S
New Band
on Saturday Night

Figure 52 Have you heard the Quonset's New Band. Saturday Night. *Park City Daily News* 05/16, 21/1956.

1958 (searched whole year)

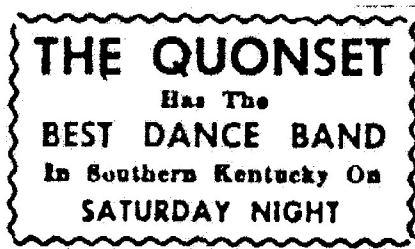


Figure 53 The Quonset has the Best Dance Band in Southern Kentucky on Saturday Night *Park City Daily News* 01/02/1958; 03/24/1958; 03/28/1958; 04/21/1958.

Note:

- Last reference to the Quonset was on May 19, 1958 with a wrestling advertisement for Ginger the Wrestling Bear.
- As the Quonset Auditorium's advertisements dwindled, I noticed more advertisements for dances at Beech Bend park and other Bowling Green venues.

1959 (searched from January through to the end of June but found no mention of the Quonset).

Note:

- Advertisements for wrestling start for matches at the Armory and Bowling Green High School in on March 22, 1959.